

**CURRICULUM INNOVATION IN MALAYSIA:
THE CASE OF KBSR**

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ABSTRACT

This study of KBSR, the New Primary School Curriculum in Malaysia, is based on the proposition that- as a response to the Cabinet Committee Report (1979) recommendation for 'overall development' - it is an innovation which seeks to replace the traditional with a more child-centred curriculum. It is argued that such a change is fundamental, involving not only classroom practices but also the philosophical-pedagogical assumptions underlying them. Further it is suggested that conditions in Malaysia are not conducive to such a change and that consequently KBSR is most likely to meet with difficulties.

The research was conducted within a broadly ethnographic or interpretive tradition. On the whole, the findings of this study confirm much of what is already known about the problems of curriculum innovation and implementation generally. However, this research underlines the importance of recognizing that many of the conceptual apparatuses of child-centred education and their implications for classroom practices are foreign to the Malaysian educational establishment: there need to be a greater concern for their adaptability and compatibility with local context. The centrality of the teacher, who interprets the curriculum and implements or rejects it as the case may~~be~~, is underscored by this research. It is concluded that the path to improving the quality of primary education in Malaysia realistically begins with raising the level of training and professionalism of the teachers.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1. THE RESEARCH ISSUE

In September, 1974, the Malaysian government set up a Cabinet Committee to review the implementation of the national education policy via the education system and its curriculum. The report of this Committee, published in 1979, contains 173 recommendations pertaining to all aspects of education from the primary to the tertiary levels. With regard to education at the primary level, several weaknesses of the prevailing curriculum were identified. These include:

- the curriculum at the primary level is 'oriented towards general education, which emphasizes academic characteristics' rather than 'basic education in which the curriculum emphasizes skills which will enhance the capability of the child to function more effectively in life after completing primary education' (para 32a).
- the curriculum has been developed based on the content of subjects, without due emphasis on the development of the child's potential (para 191).

- the content of the primary curriculum is too heavy for children between the ages of six to twelve years. Some children are unable to follow it and consequently have mastered few skills (para 193).

- in addition to the overloaded curriculum, the time allocation is so rigid that it is difficult to implement the curriculum according to the need of the children who, undeniably, have different abilities. The curriculum has been formulated for pupils of average ability, hence it does not challenge bright children and is too difficult for the weaker ones. It has also been formulated according to subjects. Consequently learning is compartmentalised and not meaningful to the pupils (para 194).

- the curriculum has also been formulated without due consideration to matters concerning the pupils' situation and environment. Some curricular contents are foreign to the pupils and not meaningful to them.....(para 195).

Based on the above findings, the three most pertinent recommendations in the Cabinet Committee Report (1979) with regard to primary education were:

Recommendation 2

Consistent with the findings concerning the present form of primary education, it is recommended that

- a) the Ministry of Education take appropriate measures to ensure that education at the primary level be in the form of basic education, with emphasis on the learning of the 3Rs, that is reading, writing and arithmetic;
- b) the curriculum for basic education should be conceived from a perspective of the kind of skills needed and not from the importance of each subject. These skills should be acquired through relevant areas of study, without a reduction in the present time-allocation for study.

Recommendation 55

It is recommended that the primary school curriculum be reviewed with a view to providing an education which has the capacity to fulfil the educational requirement for overall development, which encompasses aspects of basic education (reading, writing and arithmetic) as well as the development of the child's potentials.

Recommendation 57

In order to achieve the aim of overall development, curricular changes as proposed below should be carried out:

- a) The primary curriculum should be formulated with a view to enabling pupils to achieve skills in three basic areas, namely communication, man and his environment, and individual self-development consistent with the needs, interest, potential and mental capacity of the pupils as well as their readiness.

(Note: all emphases mine)

Looking at the above recommendations, if one were to stop short at Recommendation 2(a), the notion one gets is that the Cabinet Committee recommended a basic education that emphasized the learning of the 3Rs, and that was all there was to it. But other recommendations in the Report point to

the fallacy of making such a conclusion. In effect, the Report conceived of basic education as consisting of 'skills needed' (Recommendation 2(b)), 'skills which will enhance the capability of the child to function more effectively in life after completing primary education' (para 32), hence the reference to 'relevant areas of study' (Recommendation 2(b)). What I am saying is that basic education as recommended in the Report was not confined to the learning of the 3Rs; in fact it denoted, or at least implied, a broad spectrum possibly inclusive of skills such as inter-personal or social skills, since these skills are undeniably necessary for the child 'to function more effectively in life'. This is further substantiated by Recommendations 55 and 57. Recommendation 55 stressed an education 'to fulfil the educational requirement for overall development'. Recommendation 57 went further: 'to achieve the aim of overall development' the curricular changes proposed expressly specified 'skills in three basic areas, namely communication, man and his environment and individual self-development'. Thus, to my mind, it is possible to come to the conclusion that the thrust and the intention of the Cabinet Committee Report (1979) with regard to primary education was to bring about an education for overall development.

Now 'education for overall development' is a phrase which can be variously defined, but in the above context an

appropriate way of getting at its meaning would be to place the Recommendations against the background or context that produced them in the first place. In Malaysia, free primary education was first made available in 1962. Unlike many other Third World countries, Malaysia had succeeded in achieving the objective of universal primary education by the early seventies. The Educational Statistics for 1973 show that almost 96 percent of six-year-olds were enrolled in the first year of primary schools, with a high retention rate of nearly 90 percent. The demands for primary education, however, was not accompanied by any substantial change in the curriculum. Efforts at improving the quality of primary education were, in the main, in the form of projects to improve the teaching of certain subjects and very often this meant adding new information or perspectives to the content of these subjects. Examinations assumed a central position in the system, so that all teaching and learning were examination-oriented, with a curriculum that stressed 'academic' subjects.

As a result, in the 1970s when the Cabinet Committee conducted its review of the national education system and its curriculum, the prevailing primary education can be characterised as follows:

- a) its curriculum was overloaded, with an emphasis on rote learning and the acquisition of knowledge rather than understanding;
- b) the timetable was rigid and knowledge was compartmentalised into distinct subjects;
- c) streaming was widely practised, based on children's performance as evidenced by their test scores in end-of-year examinations;
- d) whole-class teaching was the norm, thus disregarding individual differences totally;
- e) the teacher was regarded as the dispenser of knowledge, inculcating 'essential' knowledge to passive children;
- f) subjects such as Art and Physical Education, though found in the timetable, were often put aside in favour of more 'important' subjects as teachers were concerned to cover the syllabuses by the end of the year.

In addition, as schools and teachers were often judged by the performance of their students in the standardised Assessment Examination held at the end of the fifth year of primary schooling, ensuring that as many children as possible achieve the maximum of five A's (in the 'important'

subjects Bahasa Malaysia, English, Mathematics, Science and Local Studies) became a priority. This meant that more attention was given to able children while weaker pupils, some of whom faced learning difficulties right from their first day of school, were hardly attended to. The result was that many children were found to be illiterate after the six years of primary schooling. These, then, were the prevalent conditions which the Cabinet Committee sought to address when it recommended that the primary curriculum be reviewed 'with a view to providing an education which has the capacity to fulfil the educational requirements for overall development, which encompasses aspects of basic education as well as the development of the child's potentials' (Recommendation 55; emphases mine). It was envisaged that the new curriculum - unlike the old curriculum which concentrated mainly on academic/mental development - would be comprehensive and would include, presumably, aspects of physical, social, emotional and aesthetic development as well. In other words, aspects which were totally neglected in the old curriculum would be given due consideration in an education for overall development; and in this way, the child's potential or potentials, in whatever area, could be developed and individual differences would be taken care of.

Within educational discourse, the characteristics of the old primary curriculum as I have outlined above are often attributed to what is generally referred to as the 'traditional' curriculum. This is juxtaposed against the 'progressive' or child-centred curriculum which is imbued with characteristics such as: discovery learning, experiential learning, active/activity learning, creativity and self-expression, rich and varied environment, flexibility, integration of subjects, interests and individual differences (Dewey, 1916, 1938; Plowden, 1967). If the traditional and the progressive curricula can be conceived of as the opposite ends of a continuum, the Malaysian recommendation for overall development can be interpreted as a call that the new primary curriculum moves away from the traditional end towards the progressive end of the continuum. It can be argued that 'overall development' in the Malaysian sense, then, is a euphemism for child-centred education.

I maintain that recommending a change from the traditional curriculum to a child-centred curriculum has serious implications for the Malaysian educational scene. The curriculum change that responds to this recommendation would be entirely different from those experienced in the past, when the activities of Malaysian curriculum development projects were centred on the revision or improvement of subject teaching. What is demanded now is not

merely a superficial change but one which is fundamental and involves a number of complex changes, for progressivism or child - centredness implies not only classroom practices but also philosophical-pedagogical assumptions underlying these practices. Such a change may aptly be described as a curriculum innovation, which Lawrence Stenhouse has distinguished from curriculum renewal:

Curriculum renewal is a matter of updating materials, of keeping pace with developments of knowledge and of the techniques of teaching. Curriculum innovation involves changes in the premises of teaching - its aims and values - and consequent changes in the teacher's thinking and classroom strategies.

(Stenhouse quoted by Plaskow, 1984, p.44)

In response to the recommendation of the Cabinet Committee Report (1979) a new curriculum was introduced in 1983, popularly known as KBSR* or the New Primary School Curriculum. My hypothesis is that when viewed as an attempt to change from the traditional curriculum to a child-centred one, KBSR is likely to flounder. It is conceivable that the formation of KBSR itself could have been problematic, and this has serious ramifications for its implementation, in

*KBSR is the well-known acronym for Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah, the Malay equivalent of the New Primary School Curriculum. I will use this acronym throughout the thesis.

that what actually takes place may not be a curriculum innovation involving fundamental changes in teaching-learning processes but merely a superficial level of curriculum change or even a non-change. I suggest, tentatively, at least four reasons for this, namely: (a) lack of training and professionalism among many education personnel; (b) hasty implementation, (c) centralised control and the hierarchical organizational structure of education, and (d) the particular socio-political context of Malaysia. These factors, I maintain, are potential barriers to the successful implementation of a child-centred curriculum. Let me explain these points briefly in the following paragraphs.

First, the concept of overall development vis-a-vis its implications for child-centredness, as I have outlined earlier, is actually foreign to most members of the Malaysian educational establishment, that is the personnel involved in the curriculum innovation from the curriculum planners to the classroom teachers. The present generation of education officers and teachers, it should be noted, have all been 'produced' or nurtured on the rigid, traditional, academic-oriented school curriculum. The teacher-training that they were exposed to was equally authoritarian in nature, emphasizing teaching methods or how to teach; they were not trained to be critical, reflective, innovative or

adaptive. They lack the characteristics of professionalism often attributed to their counterparts in the West. In addition, most of them have been brought up in conservative homes within a society which traditionally respects its elders unquestioningly, where children are expected to do as they are told. One can assume that to many of them progressive ideas and practices - emphasizing as it does the child as an active, questioning individual - would be difficult to grasp. I would suggest that the exceptions are those education personnel who have been exposed to western educational ideas and practices, mainly through post-graduate training in the United States or Britain.

Secondly, KBSR was hastily implemented. The Cabinet Committee Report was published in 1979. Approximately a year later the Minister of Education made the announcement that a new primary curriculum was to be 'tried out' in 1982 and implemented nation-wide in 1983. Thus there was hardly any transition period between the old and the new. This meant that all the personnel involved in implementing the change had to be hastily oriented towards the new curriculum. Measures taken, mainly constituting of short orientation courses for the teachers and other personnel, can hardly be adequate to equip them for the task of implementing a new curriculum, especially one which is premised on child-centred ideology and normally demands some degree of autonomy and professionalism from the teachers.

In contrast, child-centredness in Britain has had a long history and can be traced back to 1898 when the abolition of the system of payment by results 'led to an increasing freedom for teachers to exercise their own judgement in matters of syllabus' (DES, 1967, p.189). Child-centredness in Britain can be said to have reached its peak with the publication of a report which made a thorough review of primary education, the Plowden Report of 1967. This Report 'was not only broadly child-centred in its outlook but it also.... put the seal of official approval on that outlook...' (Dearden, 1976, p.49). Thus child-centredness in Britain did not develop overnight and several factors have been identified as responsible for its evolution (Whitbread, 1972; Selleck, 1972; Galton et al., 1980; Blenkin and Kelly, 1981). This will be elaborated in Chapter 2.

Third, the control of education is centralised at the Ministry of Education, which represents the highest level of the organizational structure. Here the Minister of Education is in command and he is assisted by the Secretary-General, the Director-General of Education, their Deputies and so on down the line. A similar form of organizational hierarchy exists at the state and district levels. The headteacher at the school level is at the lowest end of the hierarchy; he regularly receives and implements directives

from the centre which have been passed down to him through the appropriate channels. This top-down or centre-periphery organizational structure favours a research, development and diffusion (RDD) model of planned change which, I would argue, may be inimical to KBSR.

Finally, there is the peculiarly Malaysian socio-political context to be considered. Here is a society which, on attaining independence in 1957, found that the most urgent task facing the nation was to unite its multi-ethnic population. There was, and there still is, a concern for national culture, national language, national consciousness, national identity, loyalty to the country and so on. There has always been the conviction that education could be used as an apparatus to achieve national unity, hence Malaysian educational planning and development have generally been guided by national considerations. The stress on the individual rather than society in KBSR seems to represent a departure from the norm. Indeed child-centredness would seem to conflict with the stated goal of the nation to establish as many areas of commonality as possible among its disparate communities.

The ensuing questions are many. Among these are: How does KBSR respond to the recommendation for overall development of the child? What are the complex realities surrounding the planning and implementation of KBSR? What

are the perceptions and understanding of the various 'actors' involved with regard to the changes expected? In the classroom what are the evidences that there has been a shift from traditional to child-centred practices? Because of the significance I attach to overall development as the central focus of the Cabinet recommendation for change in the primary curriculum, this research attempts to examine KBSR holistically and in fact contrasts with a recent study on KBSR (Siti Hawa, 1986), in which the researcher takes the curriculum itself as given and non-problematic and examines the implementation of its 'basics' component (the 3Rs) at the level of Year I. Such an approach appears to me to be rather limited as it deals with only one of the several facets of curriculum change. My research, therefore, has been designed to contain several components, as follows:

1. Background analysis on child-centred education and the RDD model of change.
2. Analysis of the socio-political, educational and curricular context of Malaysia.
3. Analysis of relevant curriculum documents.
4. Fieldwork in Malaysia, consisting of interviews with 'key' personnel and classroom observations.

To conclude, underlying this research is the assumption that KBSR may be fraught with problems, not only in its implementation but possibly right from its inception. I am not, however, saying that all of its aims are not realizable. This is a case study of a particular innovation in an attempt to discover the nature of the problems involved in its design and implementation and to explain them. The assumption that this innovation is problematic is not without a theoretical and empirical base as there exists an abundant literature on educational change which tends to demonstrate that problems invariably arise when an innovation is introduced (for example, Smith and Keith, 1971; MacDonald and Walker, 1976; Fullan, 1982). My position with regard to KBSR is that its problems should be identified and clarified - not least in order to stimulate the various actors involved in this innovation to engage in greater discussion and reflexivity and a continuous reassessment of their roles in the efforts to improve the quality of primary education in Malaysia, but also to contribute to advancing our understanding of curriculum innovation generally.

2. ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

In this thesis, Chapter 1 sets out the research problem to be investigated. The rest of the chapters are arranged more or less from the general to the specific. Chapters 2 and 3

discuss the related literature. As it is suggested that KBSR is a child-centred curriculum, Chapter 2 provides an account of child-centred education in the United States and England, noting the historical and political conditions that brought about its emergence and later its decline; the conceptual apparatuses of child-centred education and their implications for classroom practices and the role of the teacher within this framework are also highlighted. Chapter 3 considers research, development and diffusion (RDD) as a model of planned change because an approximation of it has always been the model used for curriculum change in Malaysia; it is argued that the socio-political context of Malaysia and its hierarchical educational structure in fact favour this model and that alternative models are incompatible.

Chapter 4 examines the Malaysian context for change. A brief historical background is provided in order to appreciate the difficult task facing the nation when it gained independence in 1957 - that of uniting its multi-ethnic population. This imperative has been given due consideration in the development of the national education system, within which KBSR recently emerged. Obviously a great deal can be said of the Malaysian educational context but only its administrative structure and teacher education are highlighted in this thesis, as these are established in

Chapters 2 and 3 as factors which have a direct bearing on the practice of child-centred education.

The context for change becomes more specific with the examination of Malaysian curricular issues in Chapter 5. Here the infrastructure for curriculum development is examined, noting particularly the practice of curriculum renewal in the past and leading to a consideration of the recent pressures for change in the primary curriculum. This is followed by Chapter 6, which is an analytical consideration of KBSR itself. Its initial formulations, curricular framework, some implementation strategies and the public response to it are critically examined.

The next three chapters focus on the empirical research. Chapter 7 provides a rationale for the methods of data collection and also some reflections on the research methodology used. Chapter 8 presents and analyses the relevant primary data obtained through interviews. Likewise the data gained from classroom observations are analysed in Chapter 9. Finally the concluding chapter, Chapter 10, summarises the central issues raised by the research; conclusions are drawn and their implications discussed.

CHAPTER II

CHILD-CENTRED EDUCATION

In setting forth the research issue, I have argued that the recommendations of the Cabinet Committee Report (1979) with regard to primary education could be interpreted as a call for child-centred education. It follows then that KBSR, the New Primary School Curriculum which attempts to translate these recommendations into practice, could be seen as based on child-centred ideology and embodies child-centred principles and practices. In order to explore the validity of this claim it is necessary to examine the related literature, namely the literature on child-centred or progressive education. At the outset I should like to point out that I consider progressivism to be synonymous with child-centredness. This is the position taken in most educational discourses (for example, Entwistle, 1970; ASCD, 1972; Sharp and Green, 1975; Stewart, 1979) since, though the term 'progressivism' has taken on various shades of meaning and has embraced shifting emphases during the decades of the development of progressive education, its focal point or enduring concern is invariably 'the child'.

In this chapter I shall examine child-centredness firstly in terms of the historical and political conditions in which it developed in the western world, specifically in

the United States and England. Next, its conceptual apparatuses and their implications for classroom practices will be discussed. Here the purpose is to provide a backdrop against which the concepts within KBSR may be interrogated, to assess whether these concepts are in fact consonant with child-centredness. Finally I shall examine the role of the teacher in child-centred education in relation to the role as set out in KBSR.

1. THE HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS

The United States and England form parts of the developed industrialised, western world, yet child-centred education did not develop along identical lines in these two countries. It is possible to draw out the similarities and dissimilarities between child-centred education in England and the United States, thus indicating that at each stage of its development progressivism has its own peculiar meaning characterised not only by its temporal context but also its location. When comparing child-centred education in these two countries with the one being introduced in Malaysia, the point to note is that historically the link between the United States and Malaysia has mainly been economic in nature; American educational influence began to be felt in Malaysia only in the 1970s, and this has been confined to tertiary education. Britain, on the other hand, had established an economic and political connection with Malaysia during the second half of the eighteenth century

and remained Malaysia's (then known as Malaya) colonial ruler till independence was achieved in 1957. Secular education in Malaysia was introduced by the British, with a structure patterned on the British education system. Certainly, one would expect some similarities between educational practices in England and Malaysia. We shall see later whether there are common elements that seem to contribute to the perceived need for child-centredness in both the United States and Malaysia.

I shall begin by looking at the various accounts of child-centred education in the United States, followed by a similar examination of child-centredness in England.

1.1 The United States

Progressive education in the United States emerged as a response to industrialism. It has been described as an 'ethical movement' (Macdonald, 1972), its underlying philosophical assumptions varying across a whole range of theories. For instance, the ethical bases for prescriptions of what ought to be taught in American schools have been justified from time to time and variously on rational (scientific orientation of growth, development and learning) as well as intuitive and emotional grounds.

Cremin (1961) has documented well the integral historical relationship of progressive education to forces of broader societal reform, tracing its genesis to the decades immediately following the Civil War. He points out that it began as part of a vast humanitarian effort to apply the promise of American life - the ideal of government by, of, and for the people - to the puzzling new urban-industrial civilization that came into being during the latter half of the nineteenth century. 'The word progressive provides the clue to what it really was: the educational phase of American Progressivism writ large. In effect, progressive education began as Progressivism in education: a many-sided effort to use the schools to improve the lives of individuals.....' (Cremin, 1961, Preface).

What then were the conditions in which progressivism initially developed? Kliebard (1979a) cites a number of factors which may have been responsible for the 'period of unusual general ferment in education' towards the end of the nineteenth century. The year 1890 marked the beginning of a forty-year period when the high school population doubled every decade, and so there was a need for curricular reform. Another factor was the sheer growth of knowledge in the nineteenth century, which posed a challenge to the hegemony of the traditional subjects in the school curriculum. Next, the American society was undergoing transformation from a predominantly rural country of small towns and villages to

an urban, industrial nation, with the consequent public awareness that the nineteenth century institutions were no longer as effective as they had been in the past. The increasing waves of immigrants to America, particularly from Southern and Eastern Europe, was also an important contributory factor; it was obvious then that the Americanization of immigrants would become a special function of the school in the decades ahead (Kliebard, 1979a, pp. 192-193).

It is also worth noting that it was at about this time, too, that the Herbartian Society, which was later to become the National Society for the study of Education, was founded. Unlike the more conventional educators, the Herbartians saw the primary purpose of the school as developing the moral character of the individual, whereas the prevailing view was that the school should prepare pupils for their adult life in society. The Herbartians found themselves opposed mainly because 'they denied the primacy of the social function of the school' (Button, 1965, p. 254). This 'new pedagogy' is said to have 'the child as the cornerstone', in sharp contrast to 'a course of study from our adult point-of-view' (Drost, 1967, p. 188).

Specifically with regard to the schools of the 1890s, Cremin (1961) has presented a clear account of the depressing conditions within them. Schools everywhere were beset by financial problems as well as mundane problems of

students, teachers and classrooms. Rural schools were in acute need for repair, with pupils receiving instruction from untrained teachers who concentrated on old readers and drill. In the cities the problems were badly lighted, poorly heated and frequently unsanitary school buildings, compounded by huge enrolments - young immigrants from different countries flocked to these schools, and superintendents of schools were recorded to have spoken vainly of reducing class size to sixty per teacher. As school budgets increased, corruption became rampant: teaching and administrative posts were bought and sold; school buildings became incredibly expensive to build; and politics pervaded everything from the assignment of textbook contracts to the appointment of school superintendents (Cremin, 1961, pp. 20-21).

There were pedagogical protests during the seventies and eighties but these were local and intermittent in nature. The nineties, on the other hand, brought criticism of the schools to a head, soon assuming a nationwide social movement. The call for action to rid the school system of political interference, to have teachers who would strive to improve their professional competence, so that 'all citizens could have the life and warmth of the "progressive school" for their children' (Cremin, 1961, p.5) was initiated by the New York monthly The Forum.

Once under way, the movement manifested itself in a remarkable diversity of pedagogical protest and innovation; from its very beginning it was pluralistic, often self-contradictory, and always closely related to broader currents of social and political progressivism. In the universities it appeared as part of a spirited revolt against formalism in philosophy, psychology, and the social sciences. In the cities it was but one facet of a wider program of municipal clean-up and reform. Among farmers it became the crux of a moderate, liberal alternative to radical agrarianism. It was at the same time the 'social education' demanded by urban settlement workers, the 'schooling for country life' demanded by publicists, the vocational training demanded by businessmen's associations and labour unions alike, and the new techniques of instruction demanded by avant-garde pedagoguesIt enlisted parents and teachers, starry-eyed crusaders and hard-headed politicians. And in less than two generations it transformed the character of the American school.

(Cremin, 1961, p. 22)

Thus various strands of social reform and protest account for the emergence of the progressive education movement in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. It was only natural, therefore, that the movement developed quite different emphases from educator to educator and from school to school. However, there was a common assumption: that a society could be changed through the way its children are educated. There was also a common image as to how American society could be changed for the better: by redressing social inequalities and injustices, greater rationality and objectivity in personal and social decision-making, less conformism and so on. 'For all, the focus was on the child as a learning organism, on what knowledge, what ways of knowing, what impulses towards continuous growth could be developed and mastered during the learning years' (Biber, 1972, p. 45)

To illustrate further the connection between progressive education and its social-political context, I should like to cite some of the writings of John Dewey who, undeniably, was the most well-known of the American progressives and has sometimes been referred to as 'the father of progressive education'. In 1926 when the executive committee of the Progressive Education Association invited Dewey to be its Honorary President, their letter to him stated that 'More than any other person you represent the philosophical ideals for which our Association stands' (cited by Cremin, 1961, p. 249). He was Honorary President of the Association till his death in 1952, though he was sometimes critical of its outlook.

In 1899, Dewey published *The School and Society* in response to criticism of his Laboratory School. In this book he argued that since social life had undergone a thorough and radical change under the impact of industrialism education, if it were to have any meaning for life, must pass through an equally complete transformation. He described 'the old school' or traditional education as isolated from reality, while his own Laboratory School at the University of Chicago was an 'embryonic community' to improve the larger society by making it more 'worthy, lovely and harmonious' (Dewey, 1899, pp. 43-44). Underlying Dewey's argument was a concern for social reform: a new kind

of society was emerging, so a new kind of education was mandatory if this society were to succeed. In 1916, Dewey's *Democracy and Education* was published. Many educators recognize this book as the most important educational treatise of the twentieth century. In this book Dewey attempted to show the connection between education in a democracy with the three newly significant cultural forces of the early twentieth century as he saw it, namely: 'experimental method in the sciences, evolutionary ideas in the biological sciences, and the industrial reorganization' (Dewey, 1916, Preface). He explored the social role of education. Convinced that the continuity of human society was possible only by the continual transmission of its ideas and practices from generation to generation, he asserted that 'education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life' (Ibid, p. 3). Schools could not, on their own, build a new social order but they could be one of the instruments in fashioning it. Teachers could help to create a favourable climate for change through their approach to teaching methods, selection of subject-matter, school discipline and administration of the school. Thus to Dewey, 'education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform..... through education society can formulate its own purposes, and thus shape itself with definiteness and economy in the direction in which it wishes to move' (quoted by Archambault, 1974, p. 437).

By 1916 Dewey had already earned for himself the reputation of a leading spokesman of progressivism. Thus when his *Democracy and Education* appeared it was acclaimed by some as the most notable contribution to pedagogy since Rousseau. He had provided the most comprehensive statement of the progressive education movement. It can be seen that Dewey's 'progressive' ideas arose out of the conditions of his time, particularly the effect of industrialism on society and democracy. As has been summed up by Cremin,

In an era of excessive formalism Dewey wrote of bringing the school closer to life; in an age of educational inequity he talked of democratizing culture; at a time of unbridled economic individualism he called for a new 'socialised education' that would further a spirit of social responsibility. The timeliness of his criticism was its greatest strength, and it should be no surprise that a newly self-conscious teaching profession adopted him as its first major prophet.

(Cremin, 1961, p. 239)

At the beginning of the twentieth century progressive education in the United States was full of promise and optimism. The founding of the Progressive Education Association in 1919 changed the movement significantly from a rather loosely joined revolt against pedagogical formalism to a vigorous organizational voice. But there were also changes in the image of progressivism itself, which ultimately influenced the course and meaning of educational reform.

Two different stands of progressivism developed in the twenties; one may be characterized as championing individuality and self-expression, the other expounding scienticism and social efficiency. The former, advanced by the intellectual avant garde of the period, was expressed in the rhetoric of child-centred pedagogy and virtually eclipsed the social reformist stress in the progressivism of the earlier decades. One of the most notable protagonists of this strand of progressivism was Harold Rugg, a professor at Teachers College and an active participant in the Progressive Education Association. In 1928, together with Ann Shumaker, he published *The Child-centred School* which became the characteristic progressivist work of the twenties. This volume was an interpretive survey of pedagogical innovations across the country and related these innovations to the broader stream of progressivism; creative self-expression, they argued, was the essence of the progressive education movement. So just as prewar progressivism cast the school as an apparatus of social reform, postwar progressivism was imbued with the notion that each individual was endowed with unique, creative potential. The task of the school, then, was to encourage children to develop these potentials, this being the best guarantee of a larger society devoted to human worth and excellence. This conviction of child-centredness was manifested in many schools, notably the Play School, in which children were offered as rich a variety of first-hand

experiences as possible. The usual ingredients of an elementary education, such as the 3Rs, were present in this school but the teaching situations remained unstructured.

Apart from the notion of creative self-expression, another intellectual influence on the child-centred pedagogy of the twenties was Freudianism. Freudian ideas were discussed as 'the new psychology' among the intelligentsia and soon after the war books began to appear specifically applying psychoanalytical concepts to pedagogy. As described by Cremin (1961):

Teachers were urged to recognize the unconscious as the real source of motivation and behaviour in themselves and their students..... The real function of the teacher was to provide as many opportunities as possible for successful sublimation during the child's formative years. Here, rather than in communicating specific bodies of information or rules of behaviour, was the most important work of the school.....repressive authority gave way to the effort to free pupils from earlier childhood fixations so that they might undergo normal development.

(Cremin, 1961, pp. 209-210)

This Freudian progressivism was manifested most notably at the Children's School in New York, in which the emotional aspect of education was given as much importance as the intellectual. The curriculum in this school was based on the 'apparently unlimited desire and interest of children to know and to do and to be' (quoted by Cremin, 1961, p. 211). However, the direct impact of Freudianism on pedagogy was relatively limited. Most teachers, having been trained in

the doctrines of connectionism, remained ignorant of its technicalities.

The 'scientific' strand of progressivism in the twenties was preceded by Thorndike's dream of a genuine science of pedagogy and the rapid development of intelligence and aptitude tests. The Stanford-Binet scale and its various adaptations and refinements had triggered one of the major social controversies of the twenties. Progressive intellectuals were divided on this controversy. Some were in favour of limiting college enrolments, maintaining that only a fixed percentage of the population could be educated with any reasonable and social benefit. Others, such as Dewey, argued that the IQ was only

.....an indication of risks and probabilities. Its practical value lies in the stimulus it gives to more intimate and intensive inquiry into individualised abilities and disabilities.....even the most limited member of the citizenry had potentialities that could be enhanced by a genuine education for individuality.

(Cited by Cremin, 1961, pp. 190-191).

The testing controversy continued for some time but more important was the promise of efficiency dangled by science. The spirit of science produced a second stream of curriculum reform in the twenties in the name of social efficiency. This was best exemplified by John Franklin Bobbitt, who was dedicated to the construction of a science of education and concerned himself with the application of scientific principles to the practical problems of schooling. His

book, *How to Make a Curriculum*, published in 1924, was an effort to demonstrate how such principles could be used intelligently in the task of curriculum construction. In one section he wrote: 'Education is primarily for adult life, not for child life. Its fundamental responsibility is to prepare for the fifty years of adulthood, not for the twenty years of childhood and youth' (Bobbitt, 1924, p.8). The objectives of the curriculum were to be discovered by finding out what successful individuals do in life. The difference between what these competent adults do and what children are able to do constitutes the gap to be reduced through curricular experiences.

Bobbitt's identification of the actual with the desirable was closely tied to the search for a science of education, for in the ongoing life of the community there was something visible, measurable and classifiable. But there was another aspect - the need in adult life for cooperation, unity, and an accepting attitude among specialized workers in industry. As has been argued by Apple (1979), the curriculum was to be used to foster social integration. The following quotation from Bobbitt is cited by Apple:

How does one develop a feeling of membership in a social group, whether large or small? There seems to be but one method and that is, to think and feel and ACT with the group as a part of it as it performs its activities and strives to attain its ends. Individuals are fused into coherent small groups, discordant small groups are fused into the large internally cooperating group, when they act together for common ends, with common vision,

and with united judgement.

(Bobbitt, quoted by Apple, 1979, p. 70).

The belief that scientific methods could yield educational ends as held by Bobbitt and others was generally repudiated by the progressives. The philosopher Boyd Bode remarked, 'So long as we nurse the delusion that objectives can be got by "sociological determination" we are obstructing the development that must come if education is to make its proper contribution to the advancement of democracy' (Bode, 1932, p.139). Dewey distinctively differed from the social efficiency reformers on the most fundamental issues in education. Thus Bobbitt's view of education as a preparation for adult life contrasted sharply with Dewey's idea of education as a process of living. The socially efficient curriculum prepared the child specifically for a particular social and occupational role. This was considered by Dewey as undemocratic as well as leaving individuals less prepared for occupational changes that might occur.

The thirties saw a different kind of educational movement in the United States known as social reconstructionism. *The Educational Frontier* (1933), a professional yearbook of the National Society of College Teachers of Education, produced a statement of philosophy of education appropriate to the contemporary socio-economic situation. This volume was the characteristic progressive statement of the decade, and

appeared to be a restatement of Dewey's philosophy adapted to the depression of the thirties. Social reconstruction sought to place schools in the forefront of social change, and curricula developed from this perspective were usually designed to deal directly with social problems in the classroom, such as inequalities along class and ethnic lines. In a way social reconstruction was perhaps a recoil from extreme child-centred progressivism. Thus George S.Counts, one of its most outspoken advocates, declared:

The weakness of the Progressive Education lies in the fact that it has elaborated no theory of social welfare, unless it be that of anarchy or extreme individualism.... If Progressive Education is to be genuinely progressive, it must...come to grip with life in all of its stark reality, establish an organic relation with the community, develop a realistic and comprehensive theory of welfare...and become less frightened than it is today at the bogies of imposition and indoctrination.

(Counts, 1969, pp. 7- 10).

However, the social reconstructionists proved to have little appeal to the education profession as a whole and little impact was made on what went on in schools (Kliebard, 1979b).

The twenties and thirties, it can be seen, were an age of reform in American education. Progressive ideas and practices were widely disseminated. The United States Office of Education, though confined by law and tradition to diffusing information and statistics, used the little power that it had to propagate progressive education. Likewise

the National Education Association chose to use its influence to advance the cause of progressivism by publishing a stream of information on 'best practices' for the consumption of school administrators and teachers across the nation. By 1937 the Progressive Education Association was able to comment that 'to experiment with children' and 'to experiment with taxpayers' money' were no longer crimes; progressive education was not a rebel movement any more, it had become respectable. Some of the most imaginative pedagogical experiments took place under private auspices, as was symbolised by the famous Lincoln School (1917-1948), in which the several strands of postwar progressivism was said to converge and intertwine effectively. Among the public schools thousands of local districts adopted one or another of the elements in the progressive programme; different aspects of progressivism were taken up by different communities, depending on circumstances and clientele. The Winnetka schools and the Dalton Plan were among the famous 'experimental' public schools (Cremin, 1961, pp. 295-298).

The progressive education movement probably reached its peak during the years immediately preceding the Second World War. Every American school was affected by it in one way or another; within the profession progressive ideas enjoyed widespread support despite the differences in emphases; and a 1940 Gallop poll revealed that the public,

too, generally favoured what was going on in the schools. About five years later, however, the more perceptive within the profession as well as outside observers realized that despite apparent successes, something of a crisis was brewing. The popular press began to attack progressive education for 'its optimistic humanitarianism, its essential naturalism , its overwhelming utilitarianism, and its persistent anti-formalism' (Cremin, 1961, p.325). It is not my intention to elaborate on the later fate of progressivism in the United States here. Suffice it to say that after the Second World War progressive education as a movement declined but its conventional wisdom continues to this day, such as in open education practices, and even in the deschooling theories of the 'romantic critics' (Silberman, 1970).

1.2 England

The most striking feature of child-centred or progressive education in England is that there has never been any clear or precise definition of the label 'progressive'. Progressivism seems to be an elusive concept and the relevant literature offers a range of rather different educational philosophies, theories and practices. And while some have argued that the English primary schools have become too child-centred or progressive (for example, Cox and Dyson (eds.), 1969), others have come up with evidence that these schools remain inherently conservative, with an

emphasis on literacy and numeracy and 'chalk and talk' (Galton, et al., 1980). Again, even when it is agreed that a school is progressive, this progressivism itself can be interpreted in different ways, as Sharp and Green's (1975) analysis of a progressive school indicates. In fact progressive educators in England, like their American counterparts, were united more by what they were against than by any common creed of their own (Selleck, 1972; Dale, 1979).

The early progressives have been described by Selleck (1972) as missionaries in their zeal to spread a new faith: the 'New Education'. They were all opposed to the old tradition of the elementary school, with its methods and curriculum dating back to 1862 when the system of 'payment by results' was introduced, which forced teachers to focus their attention specifically on the 3R's, the objective being the achievement of an elementary level of literacy and numeracy by working - class children. There were, of course, social - disciplinary objectives as well but these were not as clearly defined, for example obedience and acceptance of authority. The progressive missionaries spoke of large classes severely disciplined, of drill and rote learning, rigid teachers concerned with getting results, and so on. Peripheral or external theoretical influences began to make some impact on the system at the turn of the century. First there was the kindergarten movement based on

Froebel's theory and practice, with its concepts of natural development and spontaneity, which began to be felt in the schools in the 1890s. After the turn of the century there was the considerable impact made by Maria Montessori, with her emphasis on structured learning, sense training and individualization. Then there was the work of Margaret and Rachel Mcmillan, the two sisters who emphasized providing an 'appropriate' environment for young children, and were influential in introducing new concepts of activity and creativity into the primary classroom. Finally Edmond Holmes, ex-Chief Inspector of Elementary Schools, published his **What Is and What Might Be** in 1911. This volume was 'the first striking manifesto of the "progressives" in its total condemnation of the arid drill methods of the contemporary elementary school' (Galton et al., 1980, p.34). There were other important contributors to the progressive 'faith', such as Homer Lane, but May 1911 when the ex-chief inspector published his attack on the elementary school probably marked the beginning of progressivism in England, for 'reformers who had been on the defensive gained unexpected support and defenders of the status quo were shaken when so eminent an educationist joined the ranks of their attackers' (Selleck, 1972, p.26).

Obviously there were significant differences among the early progressives, with some educationists like Lane and Neill prepared to break conventions more than others. As I

have said earlier, they were united more by what they were against, namely the authoritarian atmosphere of the classroom, the rigid timetable, the unnecessary drill and rote learning, and the denial of freedom. Their opposition to these distinguished them from their traditionalist contemporaries and made clearer to them what they were for and also convinced them of the rightness of their cause. Thus Holmes contrasted 'What Is' against 'What Might Be'. The progressives' call was to reduce the overt authority of the teacher and his domination of the child, to give some freedom to the child, to introduce flexible timetables, and to replace competition with cooperation (Selleck, 1972, pp. 50-51). In short, their primary concern was the well-being of the child, and all would agree to some extent that the child should be allowed to develop according to his/her needs, interest and potential rather than have adult ideas imposed upon them specifically in order to prepare them for their adult life.

A major contributor to child-centred education in England was Thomas Percy Nunn, whose most important writing was *Education: Its data and first principles*, published in 1920. Just as Dewey's *Democracy and Education* provided the most comprehensive statement of American progressivism, so Nunn's *Education* gave the English progressives their most influential expression after the First World War. This volume literally gave the progressives a textbook. It was

for several years the 'wisdom' that was studied by trainee teachers and it affected their outlook and subsequent practice.

To understand how disparate progressives, such as Neill (1962) and Helen Parkhurst (1930), could come to an agreement and involved themselves in the same educational 'crusade' during the early decades of the twentieth century, it is important to take into consideration the times in which the early progressives worked. There was a great deal of despair after the First World War but there was also a desperate hope for a better world. In such an atmosphere the ideas of the progressives were extremely appealing. Their policies and practices were undeniably attractive when contrasted with the horrors of the war. At a time when thousands had died at the war front,

the progressives promised a new world in which the individual mattered; they spoke of freedom, growth, play, the creative arts, self-government. 'Drill' and 'discipline' were anathema to them; they stressed differences, not uniformity; they wanted cooperation, not competition; they were eager, confident, optimistic, dedicated.

(Selleck, 1972,p.87).

Clearly the word 'freedom' must have kindled the imagination of those who were oppressed by the conditions of the war - children must be set free. The word 'individuality' had a strong emotional appeal. The enemy, Germany, was seen as a dull nation which had been drilled by its leaders. An

education system founded on child-centredness and individuality was the most logical alternative, and those who argued for a change in classroom practices made passionate appeal: 'In the name of those who have died for the freedom of Europe, let us go forward to claim for this land of ours that spread of true education which shall be the chief guarantee of the freedom for our children for ever' (cited by Walkerdine, 1983, p.81). Thus the early English progressives were united, and accepted by society, partly because 'this land of ours' had been ravaged by the war. Clearly the historical and political condition of the time were conducive to the spread of progressive ideas.

By the late twenties and the 1930s the progressives dominated educational discussions. Classroom practices had not changed much at about this time, but progressive views were most readily accepted at teacher training institutions in the colleges as well as universities, and were thus passed on to the new generation of teachers. A further evidence of how much progressive ideas had penetrated the educational atmosphere in the thirties could be seen among prominent dignitaries who were asked to be chairmen of committees or commissions, such as Henry Hadow, for official documents such as the Suggestions and the Hadow reports clearly showed progressive thinking. For example, in the 1931 Hadow Report, *The Primary School*, the education of the young child was no longer viewed as preparation for adult

life - education was to be viewed as a process in itself. The report's commitment to a progressive philosophy is reflected in several passages, including the following:

the curriculum is to be thought of in terms of activity and experience rather than of knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored. Its aim should be to develop in a child the fundamental human powers and to awaken him to the fundamental interests of civilized life...to encourage him to attain gradually to that control and orderly management of his energies, impulses and emotions....to help him to discover the idea of duty and to ensue it, and to open out his imagination and his sympathies in such a way that he may be prepared to understand and to follow in later years the highest examples of excellence in life and conduct.

(The Hadow Report, 1931,p.93)

As though echoing the progressives, the Hadow Report (1931) lamented the existence of an educational system 'where the curriculum is distorted and the teaching warped from its proper character by the supposed need of meeting the requirements of a later educational stage' (Ibid, p. 92). It considered the child 'an active agent in his early schooling' (p.153). Despite all the progressive intention, however, changes were slow to take place and it was not until after the Second World War that classroom practices were greatly modified. The point to note is that whereas at the turn of the century the progressives were merely missionaries preaching a change, by 1939 the progressive, child-centred approach had been accepted as the intellectual orthodoxy.

One other important factor that aided the spread of progressivism in England needs to be mentioned, namely the support gained from the psychologists. There is no doubt that a great deal of the emphasis upon the child was based on propositions about learning and child development, psychological insights which Entwistle (1970) referred to as the 'technical' or 'empirical' basis of child-centredness. The psychologist Susan Isaacs brought together Freud, Dewey and Piaget in her school for children aged 2-10 years at the Malting House, Cambridge, in the late twenties. She concentrated her work on young children, combined philosophy, psychoanalysis and developmental psychology, and together with Burt and Percy Nunn she was an influential figure in teacher-training in the thirties (Stewart, 1979,p.106). She was a strong advocate of the 'activity methods', one of the cornerstones of the progressives, but at the same time she believed in streaming children based on 'intelligence'. At this time the concepts underlying child-centredness and streaming were not thought to be contradictory. In fact, streaming was very Froebelian for it was to provide optimum conditions for the development of the child's mental characteristic, such characteristics being fixed, inborn and not subject to change according to the dominant school of psychology in the inter-war years (Galton, et al., 1980, p.37). The insertion of the psychology of individual differences was also evident in the Hadow Report of 1931, which advocated streaming as the basic

form of internal school organization. The construct of intelligence, however limited we now recognize it to be, was in its time a progressive contribution from the psychologists. In fact the discourses of mental measurement, as well as child development, were extremely important in the child-centred pedagogy of the 1930s (Walkerdine, 1984).

Stewart (1979) has argued that until 1945 progressive education in England was identified with a minority of middle-class, independent schools. Except for Montessori, Lane and Margaret McMillan, who worked with poor children, others were concerned with middle-class schools patronized by the intelligentsia and their children. Bedales, Summerhill and Gordonstoun were examples of such schools. While agreeing that the best known experiments in progressive education took place in independent schools with largely self-selected clienteles, Dale (1979) has pointed out that progressive ideas were not confined to such extra-system schools only. He cites the 1905 Handbook of Suggestions and the Hadow reports on junior and infant schools in the 1930s, which gave official support to child-centred education. However, in the state schools progressive practices developed mainly in the infant school. In the junior school, progressive ideas could not be implemented both before and after the Second World War mainly because teachers were constrained by the 11-plus

examination. It was only after this examination was abolished that teachers felt free to practice 'progressivism'. Another obstacle was the hostile economic climate during the inter-war period, hence the need for restraints in public spending, especially in education.

The 1950s and particularly the 1960s saw the expansion of progressive education, followed by its disintegration in the 1970s and 1980s. Each era had its own historical and political conditions which affected child-centred education the way they did. In the 1950s the economy improved and unemployment was greatly reduced. Whereas the period of austerity in the late 1940s, together with the 11-plus examination, had posed a constraint to teachers and schools wishing to practise progressivism, in the 1950s the improved economy removed that constraint and there began to be a swing from the practice of streaming in the mid-1950s in some areas.

The 1960s was characterized by quantitative expansion: increasing school population, the extension of the period of compulsory schooling, increasing educational expenditure, the expansion of teacher-training, the spread of comprehensive reorganization and the growth of higher education. There was, as Gordon (1986) points out, a spirit of optimism during this period. It was assumed that the economy would continue to grow steadily; traditional

education seemed inappropriate, it needed to be replaced by one more in line with the technological society. New CSE examinations with greater teacher control were introduced. A massive expansion of higher education was advocated by the Robbins Report, *Higher Education* (1963), and the Newsom Report, *Half Our Future* (1963). Clearly all this expansion provided the conditions favourable for the implementation of child-centred education, especially as it meant the teacher - pupil ratio in schools would be improved. Most significant for the entrenchment of progressive education, though, was the Plowden Report, *Children and Their Primary Schools* (1967), which 'endorsed' (Sharp and Green, 1975) the development of progressive practices in primary schools. Child-centred statements abound in this Report; for example, it stated as an 'axiom' (Walkerdine, 1983) on its opening page that 'underlying all educational questions is the nature of the child himself', and it proclaimed that 'the child is the agent of his own learning' (para 529). It espoused child-centred approaches such as discovery learning, curriculum flexibility, mixed-ability teaching, individualized learning and providing a rich and varied environment. In fact, 'the Plowden Report was not only broadly child-centred in its outlook but it also ... put the seal of official approval on that outlook, with consequent nation-wide pressure on the schools to change in the favoured directions' (Dearden, 1976, p.49).

But there were also other factors affecting school practice during the 1960s. It was at about this time that the 'permissive society' developed, implying the increased autonomy and independence of youth generally; undoubtedly this affected pupil behaviour and attitudes in school. Next there was a tendency for local authorities to encourage innovation and change in primary schools, and likewise head teachers allowed a high degree of autonomy among classroom teachers who, by this time, had become more 'professional' due to the extension of teacher training to three years in 1963. Another factor was the change in the role of the HMIs and local authority inspectors from carrying out inspectorial function to providing an advisory service. This meant that the schools of 1960s were no longer kept on a tight rein. Finally, new schools were built on the open plan principle or else old buildings were modified on the same principle; this undoubtedly affected classroom organization and methods of teaching (Galton, et al., 1980, pp. 40-44)

One other important factor need to be mentioned in relation to the rise of progressive practices in the 1960s. Gordon (1985,1986) has persuasively argued that the shortage of teachers in the sixties was one of the reasons for officially promoting progressivism. With the increase in school population there was a dire need to recruit more teachers. Married women were recruited back into teaching

but an attempt was especially made to recruit graduates and boys in the sixth form. Teaching as a career had a low status and pay compared with other professions, and it was generally regarded as dull, offering little scope and prospects. Teaching had to be made more attractive, so the Department of Education and Science launched an advertising campaign, drawing attention to the salary scale of graduate teachers, the importance of education 'in a time of rapid change', the career opportunities offered by teaching, and 'the scope for new ideas and for managerial skills' (Gordon, 1986, pp. 18-19). Thus the shortage of teachers in the sixties indirectly aided the cause of child-centred education, in that the authority was forced to represent teaching as a stimulating career with a considerable degree of teacher autonomy and control over the curriculum. Conversely, less autonomy and more control would affect progressive practices. This seems to be the case in Greenfield College, Leicestershire, 'a most progressive school in Europe' researched by Gordon (1985).

Since progressive education flourished during the 1960s, this period has been referred to as the Golden Age for progressivism. In an illuminative analysis of progressive education from its endorsement to its disintegration, Dale (1979) suggests that during the 1960s there existed three major sets of condition which made possible the implementation of progressive methods in state schools:

economic prosperity, with a consequent increase for educational expenditure; growing ideological acceptance of progressivism among teachers and in key institutions (the HMI, the local inspectorate and training institutions); and an 'elective affinity' with the political groupings which dominated education, namely the Labour Party, the sociology of education and the teaching profession which together formed a 'social democratic alliance' (Dale, 1979, pp. 192-194).

The Golden Age, however, did not last for long. The onset of a world economic recession in the late 1960s provided a rationale for economic cutbacks in education in most parts of the world. In the United States, for example, educational cuts were rationalised partly by studies such as Coleman's (1966) and Jencks' (1972) which claimed that 'schools make no difference'. In England, growth in the education sector was slowed down; School Council projects were deferred; raising of the school leaving age was postponed; and resources were diverted to industrial development. The economic climate also provided the context for the views expressed in the Black Papers, the first of which was published in 1969 (Cox and Dyson, 1969). These Papers charged that the progressive methods in the primary school was the main cause of falling standards, indiscipline, vandalism, student unrest and other unwelcome tendencies.

A further indictment of progressive methods was provided by the disclosures relating to the William Tyndale school in London in 1975. Right-wing politicians charged that an extreme version of progressivism was practised in this primary school and it became a public dispute. This was soon followed by the publication of Neville Bennett's study, *Teaching Styles and Pupil Progress* (1976), which proved to be another source of ammunition for the critics of child-centred education, for the results of this research was pounced on by the media as a condemnation of the informal methods in primary school. These events formed the background to Prime Minister Callaghan's Ruskin speech in 1976, initiating the Great Debate that followed subsequently. The government's Green Paper, *Education in Schools* (DES, 1977), argued against the child-centred approach, claiming that 'in some cases the use of the child-centred approach has deteriorated into lack of order and application' (DES, 1977, p. 8).

The 1970s culminated in the advent of Thatcherism in 1979, proclaiming the Conservative government's concern with improving the quality of education and higher standards. By 1980 it became obvious that economic consideration gained ascendancy over the promotion of standards, as it was announced that 'the government's policy of maintaining and improving the quality of education must be viewed against the background of its declared prime concern with the

national economy '(cited by Gordon, 1986, p. 22). Several steps were taken to centralise education, such as the setting up of the Assessment of Performance Unit in 1975 to monitor aspects of attainment. The closure of the Schools Council - a body initially controlled by teachers - in 1982 and its replacement by two new bodies with members appointed by the Minister further curtailed the autonomy of teachers and shifted power to the centre. The most recent development is the setting up of the panel 'to set benchmarks of achievement at the watershed ages of seven, eleven and sixteen' (The Times, 24.1.87). It is likely that this panel will have a major influence, despite teacher resistance, on the way teachers are trained and children taught in the years to come. How this will affect progressive education is as yet uncertain, but already the expenditure cuts beginning in the early 1970s have had an effect on progressive teaching, particularly because of the reliance of progressive practices on a great deal of favourable teacher-pupil ratio. Add to this the reduction in teacher autonomy as I mentioned earlier. Though progressive education as an ideology is likely to persist, it seems doubtful whether its practices will survive in the hostile climate created by the state.

The foregoing accounts of child-centred experiences in the United States and England seem to have put into focus the inseparable nature of the connection between

progressivism and the social and political context of which it is a part. It is clear that in these two countries progressive education has always been a part of a larger movement for social reform, that favourable economic conditions and professional as well as official endorsement enabled it to reach its peak, and that, contrary to the supposedly apolitical nature of child-centred education, it is highly susceptible to political manoeuvres. We shall find out later to what extent these themes recur in the Malaysian form of child-centred education, if at all.

2. ITS CONCEPTUAL APPARATUSES

The previous sections of this chapter noted that there have been different strands and different emphases within the progressive education movement. As has been established by a recent research, 'progressivism can indeed best be understood as a contradictory constellation consisting of different strands, with differing implications for educational and political practice within schools' (Gordon, 1985, p. 498). Now I want to examine child-centred education in terms of its conceptual apparatuses and their practical implications for the classroom. Here, too, it is important to recognize that there is a pervasive tension within child-centredness, in that its concepts are not fixed and allow for different positions to be taken. Thus some stress the liberatory and democratic potentials of these

concepts (for example, Dewey and Plowden) while later analysts have persuasively argued for the social-control aspect of progressive education (for example, Sharp and Green, 1975; Apple, 1979). Indeed it is easier to conceptualise progressive education as what it is not, or what it is against. To the extent that this New Education initially emerged as a reaction against didactic and authoritarian schooling - as represented by the elementary school for the children of the working class during the 'payment by results' era - it can be succinctly summarised that it is against pedagogical practices of the repressive kind. It is child-centred because it invariably expresses a concern for the child.

The earliest expression of concern for the child was found in the work of Rousseau. In fact the major features of child-centred education, which came to be known as progressive education only in the twentieth century, were present in the work of nineteenth century educators such as Pestalozzi, Herbart and Froebel in one form or another. However, the greatest and clearest statement of the concepts of child-centred education is said to be found in the writings of John Dewey, for 'he refashioned its foundations by placing it in the context of a social philosophy expressly designed for the twentieth century. In many ways his work is a culmination of the theories....' (Blenkin and Kelly, 1981, p. 21). Since then many of the educational

thinkers of the present century have sought justification from his work. It should be useful, then, to look at some of the child-centred concepts expounded by Dewey. Bearing in mind that his voluminous writings covered philosophical and social as well as educational issues, and that his career spanned a period of some seventy years, what follows is merely a small, though significant, proportion of his thoughts on education.

Dewey was one of the key figures in the development of the basic rationale for child-centred education. He was particularly concerned with pedagogy seen in terms of children's growth and a process of unfolding but, unlike Rousseau who isolated Emile from his social environment, he underscored the importance of the social context in which children develop. In one of his earliest writings, *My Pedagogic Creed*, published in 1897, he categorically stated the essence of his educational theory: that education was not a preparation for future living but 'continuing reconstruction of experience', that experience was saturated with social reference, that individuals were 'social individuals' and society an 'organic union of individuals', that the school was a community engaged in a social process of enriching the children's own activities, that the school taught the children to control their activities and their environment by well-disciplined thinking and intelligently cooperative behaviour, and that education was 'the

fundamental method of social progress and reform' (Connell, 1980, p. 37).

To Dewey the physical, emotional, intellectual and social development of the child are all of equal importance, and he argued for a teaching-learning process that would engage the whole child; this probably gave rise to the catch phrase 'educating the "whole" child' or 'education for overall development' commonly proffered as a rationale in child-centred educational discourse. Dewey accepted that individuals have important developmental properties but he laid much more emphasis on the value of experience. 'The central problem of an education based on experience,' he wrote, 'is to select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experience' (Dewey, 1938, p. 28). This clearly demands some kind of expertise on the part of the teacher. Very often, however, his experiential theory has been given a more superficial interpretation as 'learning by doing' or 'discovery learning', thus obscuring the original significance of his thesis. In discussing Dewey's conception of education as the systematic reconstruction of experience, Skilbeck (1970) has concluded that Dewey in fact set the teacher four general tasks. First, the teacher has to find ways of enriching, balancing and clarifying the children's experience. The teacher's second task is to refine experience, for children need to be guided into reflective

channels to seek new meanings. Third, the teacher's task is that of simplifying experience, for the child is an initiate in need of adult guidance. Finally, the fourth teaching task is to find ways of connecting the child's experience with the diverse ways of life of his culture (Skilbeck, 1970, pp. 20-21).

With regard to teaching, Dewey stated that:

The fundamental factors in the educative process are an immature, undeveloped being; and certain social aims, meanings, values incarnate in the matured experience of the adult. The educative process is the due interaction of these forces. Such a conception of each in relation to the other as facilitates completest and freest interaction is the essence of educational theory.
(Dewey, 1902, p.4)

Further, convinced that the central factor in all teaching should be an attempt to develop a scientific habit of thought in the child, his Laboratory School (1896-1904) was particularly concerned with building a habit of scientific thinking among its pupils. Dewey consistently argued that the scientific method, which was synonymous with his views of reflective thinking, should permeate all school activities. One such activity in his school was the building of the playhouse by his pupils. Not only did the children employ the scientific method in this activity, they also practised the social requirement of cooperative behaviour.

In *The Child and the Curriculum* Dewey strongly criticised both the subject-centred as well as the child-centred approach to curriculum construction, over which there was then a debate among the progressives. He asserted that it was the failure to keep in mind the double aspect of subject-matter which caused the curriculum and the child to be set apart. One detects a feeling of impatience when he made the following exhortation:

Abandon the notion of subject-matter as something fixed and ready-made in itself, outside the child's experience; cease thinking of the child's experience as also something hard and fast; see it as something fluent, embryonic, vital; and we realise that the child and the curriculum are simply two limits which define a straight line, so the present standpoint of the child and the facts and truths of studies define instruction. It is continuous reconstruction, moving from the child's present experience out into that represented by the organized bodies of truth that we call studies.
(Dewey, 1902, p.11)

Finally, it should be noted that Dewey advocated liberty and freedom for the child - as against the rigid, authoritarian atmosphere of the traditional classroom - but these were to be given with a specific purpose and not meant to lead to anarchy. Thus on liberty he stated, '..... liberty for the child is the chance to test all impulses and tendencies on the world of things and people in which he finds himself, sufficiently to discover their character so that he may get rid of those which are harmful, and develop those which are useful to himself and others' (cited in Skilbeck, 1970, p.68). Likewise freedom is encouraged for a

specific purpose:

Give a child freedom to find out what he can and can not do..... The physical energy and mental inquisitiveness of children can be turned into positive channels. The teacher will find the spontaneity and the liveliness, and the initiative of the pupil aids in teaching

(Ibid, pp.68-69).

Just as Dewey had provided the clearest statement of child-centred education during his era, the Plowden Report is the most developed public statement on child-centredness since the 1960s. Not only does it contain views on the nature of the child and learning, but also the implications of these for teaching, classroom organization and the curriculum. The Report's overall educational view, stated right at the beginning, is as follows: 'Underlying all educational questions is the nature of the child himself' (DES, 1967, p.1). This proposition is reiterated and reinforced in other parts of the Report, for example: 'At the heart of the educational process lies the child.....' (Ibid, p.7). All the main characteristics of progressive education, as we now understand it, seem to be summarised in the following passage:

A school is not merely a teaching shop, it must transmit values and attitudes. It is a community in which children learn to live first and foremost as children and not as future adults..... The school sets out deliberately to devise the right environment for children, to allow them to be themselves and to develop in the way and at the pace appropriate to them. It

tries to equalise opportunities for creative work. It insists that knowledge does not fall into neatly separate compartments and that work and play are not opposite but complementary. A child brought up in such an atmosphere at all stages of his education has some hope of becoming a balanced and mature adult and of being able to live in, to contribute, and to look critically at the society of which he forms a part.....

(DES, 1967, pp.187-188)

The above passage stresses the importance of treating children as children rather than as miniature adults, providing the right environment for their growth, taking into account individual differences and developmental stages, emphasizing education through experience and discovery learning, providing opportunities for creativity, viewing knowledge as integrated rather than compartmentalised, and considering play as an important part of children's education. It also expresses the optimism that such an education will result in balanced, critical adults who will be able to contribute to the advancement of his society, very much in the way that Dewey was convinced a child-centred education would ultimately contribute towards social progress.

The educational theories contained in the Plowden Report are certainly nothing new; they have been advanced by earlier progressives and educational psychologists. But, unlike most previous pronouncements, the Report consistently applies these theories to practice. In fact several pages

of the Report are devoted to spelling out the practical implications of its child-centred 'beliefs'. Let me, therefore, examine the Report's child-centred concepts and their classroom implications in greater detail.

As I have noted earlier 'the child', according to the Plowden Report, 'lies at the heart of the educational process' (DES, 1967, p.7). Throughout the Report there is a great deal of emphasis on the individuality of each child, and individuality is linked to the notion of 'uniqueness'. When progressives use the term 'individual differences', generally it means that each child is unique, that children differ from one another in a variety of ways such as in their needs, interests, aptitudes, skills, intellectual ability and a host of other possibilities. Thus the Report states: 'Individual differences between children of the same age are so great that any class, however homogeneous it seems, must always be treated as a body of children needing individual and different attention' (DES, 1967, p.25). This, then, is the main thrust of the Report - that all educational strategies must be based on individualization.

The above viewpoint has several practical implications. First, the traditional class lesson is not appropriate, since it does not take into account the differences between children. The uniqueness of each child logically demands that the educational process be individualized, that the

process of teaching and learning be made suitable to each child's needs, interest, rate of progress and so on. As stated in the Plowden Report,

Children are unequal in their endowment and in their rates of development. Their achievements are the result of the interaction of nature and nurture.....Whatever form of organization is adopted, teachers will have to adapt their methods to individuals within a class or school. Only in this way can the needs of gifted and slow learning children and all those between the extremes be met.

(DES, 1967, p.460).

However, the Report recognizes that there is a real difficulty in this demand. If teachers were to give individual attention at all times, only a fraction of each day would be available to each child in the classroom. Teachers are therefore advised to carry out group teaching as well, in which children who are roughly at the same stage can be taught together (Ibid, p.274). Thus group teaching is acceptable because total individualization is impractical. It is also commended because grouping fulfils a socialization function: 'in this way children learn to get along together, help one another and realize their own strength and weaknesses as well as those of others'; and furthermore it fulfils a pedagogic function, for 'children make their meaning clearer to themselves by having to explain it to others, and gain some opportunity to teach as well as to learn'. It is also held that children who are initially indifferent 'may be infected by the enthusiasm of a group while able children benefit from being caught up in

the thrust and counter thrust of conversation in a small group of children similar to themselves' (Ibid). In fact, despite the preference for individualized work, the Report also points out that on specific occasions class teaching may be desirable, such as when 'a topic for group or individual work is introduced to the whole class which is again brought together for discussion and instruction as the work develops' (Ibid). In sum, the child-centred classroom organization envisaged by the Report is one in which there is a combination of individual, group and class work, with an emphasis on encouraging individual attention for the children. Where group teaching is the strategy employed, these groups should be flexible, 'based sometimes on interest and sometimes on achievement, but they should change in accordance with the children's needs' (Ibid, p.292). Permanent groupings based on ability is strongly opposed, as this would have the effect of streaming within the classroom.

A second implication of the emphasis on individualization is the need for a flexible curriculum. Thus the Plowden Report states, 'The extent to which subject matter ought to be classified and the headings under which classification is made will vary with the age of the children..... Any practice which predetermines the pattern and imposes it upon all is to be condemned' (DES, 1967, p.198). And again,

'There is little place for the type of scheme which sets down exactly what ground should be covered and what skill should be acquired by each class in the school' (Ibid). Clearly an inflexible, pre-determined curriculum ignores the individuality of children. Since children have different interests and develop or progress at different rates, ideally there should be a differentiated curriculum for each child. However, to do so is well-nigh impossible, bearing in mind the number of children that the teacher has to cope with in each class. A feasible solution to this problem is to provide a flexible curriculum in which subject matter is not rigidly compartmentalised. An example of this is the Project Method, in which a topic is chosen and it 'cuts across the boundaries of subjects and is treated as its nature requires without reference to subjects as such....' (Ibid, p.199). A variation of the project method is the centre-of-interest approach, in which children are so involved in a topic that the work of the class will revolve around it for quite some time.

A corollary of the flexible curriculum, and also a further implication of individualizing the educational process, is the need for flexible timetabling. The 'integrated day' or 'integrated curriculum' is a device to fulfil this need. The rigid timetable of the traditional

school which specifies the exact time and duration for the teaching of each little subject is said to be contrary to the nature of the child. As stated in the Plowden Report:

It is obvious that this arrangement was not suited to what was known of the nature of children, of the classification of subject matter, or of the art of teaching. Children's interest varies in length according to personality, age and circumstances, and it is folly either to interrupt it when it is intense, or to flog it when it has declined. The teacher can best judge when to make a change and the moment of change may not be the same for each child in the class.....
(DES, 1967, pp.197-198)

Another consequence of regarding the child as a unique individual affects the practice of evaluating children's progress in the classroom. Since it is acknowledged that children progress at different rates, a standardised test or examination for all becomes irrelevant and inappropriate. The Plowden Report has concluded that 'it is not possible to describe a standard of attainment that should be reached by all or most children. Any set standard would seriously limit the bright child and be impossibly high for the dull' (Ibid, p.201). While concurring that 'some use will continue to be made of objective tests within schools', the Report advises teachers to use them 'with insight and discrimination' and they are not to 'assume that only what is measurable is valuable' (Ibid, p.202). Any set standard, in fact, would result in a child who is unable to achieve it being labelled a 'failure' - a term which child-centred educationists would seek to avoid applying to any child.

Children are not to be compared with one another. Rather, a child's progress should be measured against his/her own past performance and achievement. Currently the criterion-referenced test, rather than the norm-referenced test, seems to be the appropriate practice of evaluation in child-centred classrooms.

Related to the concept of the unique individual, too, is the notion of educating the 'whole' child or providing an education for overall development. What this means is that the child-centred curriculum, unlike the traditional curriculum, must cater not only for the child's intellectual development but his physical, emotional, social and aesthetic development as well. This is an argument which is more apparent in Dewey's writings than in the Plowden Report; the latter merely states that 'the heads of both junior and infant schools laid emphasis upon the all round development of the individual and upon the acquisition of basic skills necessary in contemporary society' (Ibid p.186; emphasis mine). Perhaps the following statement indirectly supports the same argument:

The school sets out deliberately to devise the right environment for children, to allow them to be themselves and to develop in the way and at the pace appropriate to them..... It lays special stress.....on opportunities for creative work.

(Ibid, p.187).

Since each child is unique, it is conceivable that in a classroom some children will have more potential for aesthetic development, others for intellectual development and still others for physical development. The implication is that the task of the school/teacher is to provide a variety of possible curricular resources, a rich environment, from which the child can choose according to the dictates of his/her interests or inclination. This seems to be the position taken by Dearden in his plea that 'forms of understanding' - including mathematics, science, history, the arts, physical education and extra-curricular activities - be the major components in the primary curriculum (Dearden, 1969). Such a compartmentalization of knowledge into specific subjects may appear to be contrary to the notion of flexible or integrated curriculum mentioned earlier. However, earlier progressives did not find this to be a problem in their child-centred practices. The rationale was given that a 'balanced curriculum' was necessary in order to develop 'whole' persons.

Finally, there is one other important concept in child-centred education - the principle of active learning, with its various implications. As stated in the Plowden Report, 'The child is the agent of his own learning'. It reiterates the statement made earlier in the Hadow Report (1931) that 'the curriculum is to be thought of in terms of activity and experience rather than of knowledge to be acquired and facts

to be stored'. Further it clarifies that 'activity and experience, both physical and mental, are often the best means of gaining knowledge and acquiring facts' (DES,1967, p.195). In other words, it is held that effective learning takes place only when the child is involved in an activity or experience. The reference to the child as the agent in his own learning implies that learning is an active rather than a passive process. This is similar with Dewey's experiential theory of learning which I have mentioned earlier. Unfortunately, the concept of active learning sometimes leads to an over-emphasis on 'activity methods' or 'learning by doing' in the classroom. Such an interpretation is the result of the failure to recognize that the essence of 'active learning' is the direct personal and 'mental' involvement of the child in the learning process; it does not necessarily demand a physical activity from the learner (Blenkin and Kelly, 1981). The concept of active learning forms the rationale for the Nuffield Mathematics project, as has been analysed by Walkerdine (1984); this is a clear example of the application of a child-centred theory to practice during the 1960s.

Related to the concept of active learning is the notion of play as an important activity vital to children's learning. 'Play is the principal means of learning in early childhood. It is the way through which children reconcile

their inner lives with external reality. In play, children gradually develop concepts of causal relationships, the power to discriminate, to make judgements, to analyse and synthesise, to imagine and to formulate ' (DES, 1967, p.193). Clearly the maxim is that children learn through play. This 'theory' is translated into classroom practices such as the Nursery Record Card which entails teachers observing and recording their children's play (Walkerdine, 1984), and the provision of water, sand, paints, constructional toys and others in the infant classroom.

'Discovery learning' is yet another term associated with active learning and experiential learning. 'The sense of personal discovery,' according to the Plowden Report, 'influences the intensity of a child's experience, the vividness of his memory and the probability of effective transfer of learning' (Ibid, p.201). There have been many critics of this notion of learning by discovery, especially from those who conceptualise it to mean letting children find out for themselves. In fact, child-centred educationists generally recognize that the active participation and guidance of the teacher is necessary to prepare the child for the explorations that would lead to discovery learning.

All the child-centred concepts mentioned above - the unique individual, individualizing instruction, the flexible curriculum, active learning, discovery, play, experience - taken together lead to an inescapable conclusion, namely: that the practice of child-centred education can be best developed in a rich and varied environment. Given this, the next prerequisite - though certainly not less in importance - is a capable teacher; this brings me to an examination of the role of the teacher in child-centred education.

3. THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

It is clear from the foregoing discussion on conceptual apparatuses that the role of the teacher in child-centred education is different from that of the teacher in a traditional classroom. The traditional teacher relies on a pre-planned curriculum for all the children, often with pre-packaged materials as well, and his/her task is to cover the prescribed syllabus for that particular term or year. The child-centred teacher, on the other hand, must be prepared to devise individualized work and is not expected to instruct or teach in an authoritarian style. He/she must support and guide children in their own explorations and to organize the learning environments to facilitate individual children's growth. Hence the terms 'guide' and 'facilitator' are commonly used to denote the role of the child-centred teacher. In addition, Stewart (1979) has used

the terms 'therapist' and 'psychologist' - emphasizing, perhaps, the individualized, one-to-one approach that is preferred in the child-centred classroom, though this often remains an ideal.

The role of the teacher is quite clearly spelt out in the Plowden Report. Its aversion to the traditional form of teaching leads it to express that 'A teacher who relies only on instruction..... will disincline children to learn' (DES, 1967, p.195). It urges the primary school 'to build on and strengthen children's intrinsic interest in learning and lead them to learn for themselves rather than from fear of disapproval or desire for praise' (Ibid, p.196). The teacher's task, according to the Report, is 'to provide an environment and opportunities which are sufficiently challenging for children and yet not so difficult as to be outside their reach' for 'children can think and form concepts, so long as they work at their own level, and are not made to feel that they are failures' (Ibid, p.196). In order to carry out their task, teachers 'must rely both on their knowledge of child development and on detailed observation of individual children for matching their demands to children's stages of development' (Ibid). In addition, they are 'to adopt a consultative, guiding, stimulating role rather than a purely didactic one' (Ibid,

p.198), and they are 'responsible for encouraging children in enquiries which lead to discovery and for asking leading questions' (Ibid, p.201).

Obviously the child-centred teacher has a complex and demanding role to play. The classroom implications of individualizing the educational process, such as the need for a flexible curriculum and timetabling, have already been discussed earlier. Here I want to consider more specifically what these implications mean for the teacher. Take, for example, the teacher's responsibility for classroom organization. Given that the Plowden Report envisages a combination of individualized, group and class teaching, the teacher has to decide when each of these approaches or strategies is appropriate. In the event of grouping, there is the question of the basis for this grouping as well as the size and composition of each group. Further, the physical layout of the classroom has to be considered: which part or corner of the classroom each group is to be situated; and, bearing in mind that the child-centred classroom must have a rich and varied environment, the arrangement of resource materials is important for practical purposes. The teacher is also responsible for the content of the curriculum and its organization, such as how much time is to be spent on each activity or how much freedom is to be given to children to determine their own

involvement. Skills in questioning, commenting and leading a discussion are very important. For a conscientious teacher the most exacting demand, perhaps, is the need to decide how he/she will divide his/her attention among the many children in the class, without running the risk of favouring some and being unfair to others.

Indeed there is no denying the complexity and variety of the tasks to be performed by the child-centred teacher. The Plowden Report itself acknowledges that the demands made on teachers appear to be 'frighteningly high' (Ibid, p.311). What is also obvious is that since virtually all classroom decisions are to be made by the teacher - together with the pupils, we could add - a great deal of autonomy must be accorded to him/her. In fact the very nature of child-centred education itself implies that the 'guide' or 'facilitator' in the classroom is an autonomous individual, unhindered by external factors such as a nationally imposed curriculum or an authoritarian head teacher. The teacher who is expected to individualize teaching must have the autonomy to make a host of professional decisions on his/her own.

How, then, does a teacher obtain this 'autonomous' attribute which is so essential for the implementation of child-centred education? To answer this question, it is

useful to consider briefly the development of autonomy among teachers in the English primary schools, for it is widely acknowledged that they have enjoyed a great deal more autonomy than their counterparts in other parts of the world.

The autonomy of English primary school teachers is actually a phenomenon which has evolved gradually over the past decades of the twentieth century. During the payment-by-results era no such autonomy existed; the content and methods of teaching were determined by the education authority and the teachers' task was to follow directives issued to the schools. The abolition of this system in 1898 led to an increasing freedom for teachers to use their own discretion in matters of syllabus. Then in 1905 the Board of Education issued a *Handbook of Suggestions for the Consideration of Teachers*, indicating in fact that teachers were free to use their own judgement when preferred. This freedom was further emphasized when the preface of the 1918 edition of this *Handbook* stated that 'each teacher shall think for himself, and work out for himself such methods of teaching as may use his powers to the best advantage and be best suited to the particular needs and conditions of the school' (cited in DES, 1967, p.189). The Hadow Report of 1931, greatly influenced by Piaget's thought and recognizing the need for child-centred education, was a further boost

toward teacher autonomy and its publication led to much variety of content and approach in the primary curriculum. During the war the Hadow Report on Primary School was given serious consideration, and so were the writings of educationists such as Susan Isaacs, as there was a growing awareness of social problems. The war also induced some teachers to be more autonomous as they had to be resourceful: 'Teachers who had taught the same stuff in the same city classroom for fifteen years found themselves in the fens, or the hills, or the farmlands, the only link with the children's background, and they simply had to re-think what they were doing' (Blackie, 1967, p.10). Significantly in the Education Act of 1944, the only statutory requirement that remained was that 'children should be educated according to their age, ability and aptitude' (DES, 1967, p.189). More generally the war had caused widespread questioning, so that in 1945 the climate was favourable to change.

The establishment of Emergency Training Colleges for Teachers during the postwar years proved to be another impetus for teacher autonomy. 'Into these came.....young men not straight from school but who had, a few months before, been fighter pilots, commandos, submarine crew and so on and who, a year later, brought into the schools a very different outlook on life.....' (Blackie, 1967, p.10). Undoubtedly this different intake of trainees into the

colleges produced a different breed of teachers than those who had formed the teaching staff in the 1930s. Mention must also be made of the important role played by the training colleges generally and H.M. Inspectors, however indirectly, to bolster the autonomy of teachers. The former, through providing professional courses which favoured child-centred pedagogy, effectively stressed the importance of teacher autonomy. The latter, first by relaxing its inspectorial role and later by providing advisory services that emphasized child-centred practices, had the same effect. At the micro level it is important to note that the head teacher of the English primary school is given almost complete freedom to decide on the curriculum, methods of teaching, school discipline and so on. This freedom is then passed on to classroom teachers, thus providing them the opportunity to be autonomous individuals in practice. Finally in the 1960s, as I have discussed earlier, the shortage of teachers led to the DES campaign to attract graduates and young men to become teachers by officially promoting the profession as one in which there is a great deal of opportunity for creativity, imagination and so on; in other words, the teaching profession recognizes the autonomy of individual teachers, according to the DES advertisement. The extent to which teachers cherish their autonomy is currently reflected in the teacher resistance to centralization: the government's move towards greater

centralization of education is seen by teachers as a threat to their autonomy, that they are in effect being deprofessionalized.

In the above analysis of the role of the teacher in child-centred education, I have specifically highlighted the complexity of this role and the fact that the individualization of the educational process virtually means teachers have to be granted autonomy to deal with professional matters in his/her classroom. Such autonomy, based on the experience of teachers in the English primary school, seems to have evolved over time. Teacher autonomy does not emerge overnight. The point I would like to make is that it is essential for any authority that wishes to introduce child-centred education to ensure, first of all, that teachers are professionally ready for the complex demands that will be made upon them, and secondly, that some degree of freedom or autonomy will be guaranteed for the classroom teachers. It will be noticed that time is a necessary ingredient for the development of these two essentials. One conclusion to be drawn, therefore, is that any innovation attempt at child-centred education is likely to flounder if it were hastily planned and implemented. I shall have recourse to this point again later when examining the Malaysian educational context for change.

4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have presented an account of the development of child-centred or progressive education in the United States and England, focusing on the historical and political conditions that brought about its emergence and later led to its decline. From the account it is clear that child-centred education in these two countries has always been part of a wider movement for social reform. Then I examined child-centred education in terms of its conceptual apparatuses and their implications for classroom practice. In doing so it became apparent that several terms have become closely associated with child-centred education, to the extent that they reflect aspects of child-centred teaching and learning. These terms are listed below:

- individuality/the unique individual
- individual differences
- individualized teaching/learning
- group teaching
- needs and interests
- active learning/learning by doing
- discovery/experiential learning
- play
- flexible curriculum
- integrated curriculum
- activity curriculum/method

- project method
- centres of interest
- the 'whole' child
- overall/all-round development
- balanced curriculum
- liberty and freedom
- creativity and imagination
- rich and varied environment
- teacher as guide or facilitator.

There follows an examination of the role of the teacher in child-centred education. I have noted the complexity and variety of the tasks to be performed by the teacher in the child-centred classroom, and also the fact that professionalism as well as teacher autonomy are absolutely essential if child-centred practices are to be carried out.

In conclusion, I should like to synthesize all the points that have been brought up in this chapter: it seems to me that several conditions are necessary for the practice of child-centred education (see Fig.1). These conditions are:

- a) Professionalism. Teachers need to have the skills to carry out child-centred practices as well as to be ideologically committed. These can be cultivated through pre-service teacher education, in-service courses, advice and guidance by their

head- teachers and the Inspectorate, and also by exposure to child-centred practices already in existence, e.g. in kindergartens or nursery schools. Teacher professionalism also implies that teachers have some degree of autonomy to make professional decisions.

- b) Official endorsement. The education authority needs to be convinced of the need for child-centred education; for example, the Hadow and Plowden Reports based it on the scientific evidence provided by child psychology.
- c) Favourable economic context. Since individualization of the educational process means a great deal of curricular resources and more teachers are needed, an unfavourable economic climate would jeopardize the chances of child-centred education being practised.
- d) Political conditions. Sometimes teacher autonomy and children's freedom, two fundamentals of child-centred education, can be interpreted as a threat or challenge to the political structure of society. Thus child-centred practices can survive only if there is political affinity with the government of the day.

Child-centred education in the United States and England, as I have examined in the foregoing pages, initially emerged almost naturally as part of a wider movement for social reform. Later, however, there were more deliberate attempts to spread child-centred practices. In the United States this was done mainly through pre-packaged, teacher-proof, curricular materials. The curriculum development movement in England in the 1960s, likewise, was also directed at spreading more child-centred practices. In the Malaysian context, a form of child-centred education is currently being introduced in the primary schools throughout the nation via a specific curriculum innovation. A common factor in all three countries is that their curriculum interventions have employed the centre-periphery or research, development and diffusion (RDD) model of planned change, in Britain at least initially. I propose, therefore, to examine the RDD model in the chapter that follows.

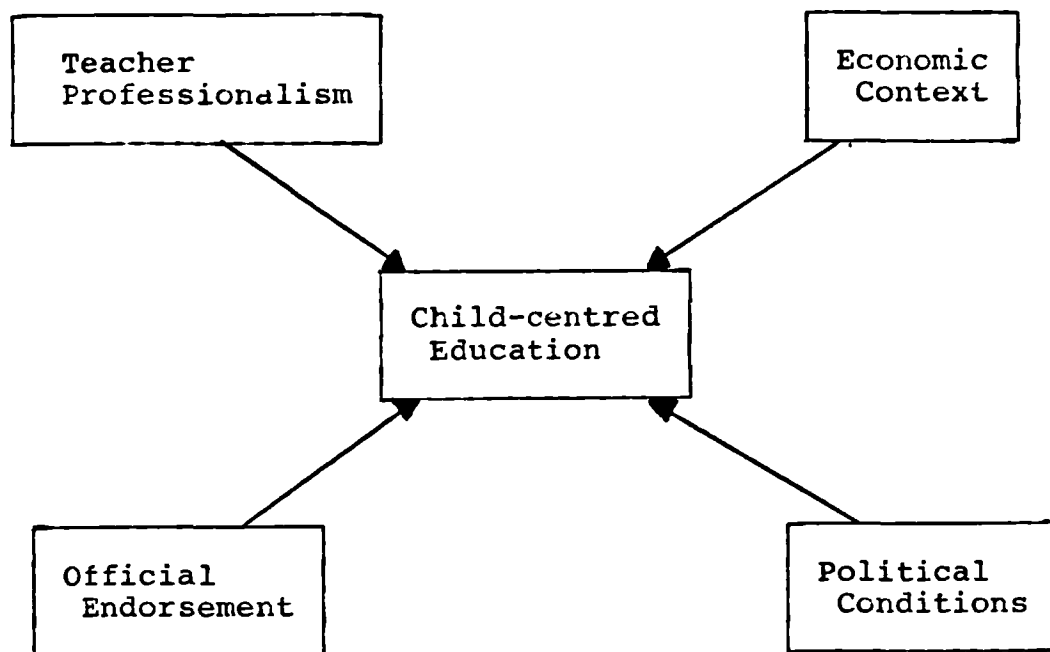


Fig.1: Conditions necessary for the practice of child-centred education

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND DIFFUSION AS A MODEL OF PLANNED CHANGE

In this chapter I shall examine the centre-periphery or research, development and diffusion (RDD) model of planned change, as this is the model currently employed in Malaysia in its introduction of the New Primary School Curriculum (KBSR), though perhaps not in its pure form. The rationale and basic assumptions of this model will be discussed, and also the criticisms that have been levelled at it. Finally a reference will be made to a few alternative models that have been offered; it will be argued that these alternatives are rather inappropriate for Third World countries generally.

1. THE NEED FOR A CHANGE MODEL

Much curriculum change in the past was characterised by what Eric Hoyle calls a 'relatively unplanned and adaptive "drift"' (Hoyle, 1969). This was particularly the case in Britain during the first half of the twentieth century. A few dedicated teachers in one school would experiment on some innovatory methods of teaching or classroom organizations. Through personal contact, their examples would spread gradually to professional colleagues in other schools. Selleck (1972) has pointed out several such

instances in English primary education. However, there was an evident change of trend in the second half of the twentieth century. Both in the United States and in Britain, the 1960s saw the setting up of bodies to sponsor large-scale curriculum development projects, with most of their activities centred on the revision or improvement of subject teaching, notably mathematics and science. The Nuffield Science Teaching Project initiated the curriculum reform movement in Britain and by 1964 the State became involved through the setting up of a new institution, the Schools Council for Curriculum and Examinations, which sought 'to lend speed and quality to the ongoing process of curriculum change in the classroom by centralising the functions of invention and production' (MacDonald and Walker, 1976, p.1). There was a great deal of optimism among curriculum developers during this period. Consider the following advice:

The principle - though by no means the only - target is, of course, the classroom teacher, the 'man at the coal-face'; ensure that the ideas reach him untwisted and still attractive, and the rest of your task is easy...
(OECD, 1971, p.40)

The simplicity of this advice is extremely appealing, but it fails to take into account the reality of the classroom; it is insensitive to the diversity of educational settings; and it does not recognize the autonomy of decision makers at different levels of the education system as well as the possibility of different interpretations of the original

ideas. A curriculum change cannot be thought of as a simple matter, for it is 'a change in a social system, involving persons, groups, roles, interrelationships, values, established institutional practices and customs, and a shift in the distribution of resources' (Skilbeck, 1984a, p.5). Indeed, changing the curriculum is undoubtedly a complex process, and the history of the curriculum development movement bears testimony to this. By the late 1960s the optimism of the preceding years turned to dismay as, on both sides of the North Atlantic, the efforts to improve the quality of schooling through large-scale curriculum development projects were producing little results. Schools seemed immune to various remedies. In Britain the first wave of Nuffield projects, according to Becher, had been more successful than their American counterpart but, 'when one looks behind the statistics... one finds a surprisingly large variation in the methods of use. Far from "getting the message" implicit in the work of the development team, many teachers have superimposed their own very different interpretations and philosophies' (quoted by MacDonald and Walker, 1976, p.38). Thus planned change is not as simple as initially assumed and has remained a formidable problem to planners and curriculum developers even today.

With regard to educational change in Third World countries, it is to be expected that the problem of lack of

impact experienced in the developed countries would be similarly felt since, by and large, their educational plans are patterned on the western model, usually funded by external aids and advised by foreign experts. But the repercussion of failure, I think, is more acute, given the high hopes pinned on education to improve standards of living in Third World countries generally. Havelock and Huberman (1977), who conducted an extensive analysis of the records and reports of innovative projects in the Third World, observed:

Many of the educational innovations in developing countries involve a 'major system transformation'. They are typically ambitious both in the amount of time, energy and material resources invested and in the degree of rapid and massive changes expected. In spite of such large-scale investments and expectations, few of these innovations appear to make a major dent at the national level in the educational or training problem which they were designed to solve. They appear in many respects to be giant pilot projects.....

(Havelock and Huberman, 1977, p.15)

The point I would like to draw from the above preamble is that the various curriculum development projects of the 1960s were centre-peripheral in nature: the idea of change or innovation was initiated at the centre and then disseminated to the periphery. In the United States teacher-proof packages were developed by the sponsors and later distributed to teachers in schools. The 'Nuffield Model' in Britain is similar to the RDD model in that it emphasizes materials production, their field trial and the use of an objectives model to link materials and actions;

though the Nuffield projects depart from the pure form of the RDD model in some ways, Becher acknowledges that to a considerable extent the curriculum development movement in Britain had set out with this model (MacDonald and Walker, 1976). It should be noted that during that time there was relatively little experience available on deliberate curriculum intervention by the state to improve teaching and learning. Thus it must have been expedient, or at least convenient, to adopt the contemporary change model of large-scale research and development used in agriculture and industry.

In most newly emerging nations of the Third World, their centralised education systems make it imperative that changes are always initiated at the centre. Here it seems inconceivable for change to occur or to be implemented according to models other than the RDD paradigm, bearing in mind other factors as well, such as scarcity of resources and the lack of training and professionalism among teachers. In Malaysia, for instance, school-based curriculum development is as yet unheard of. Malaysian curriculum projects have always been developed by the Curriculum Development Centre, which is a division of the Ministry of Education. It is therefore appropriate that I examine the RDD or centre-periphery model of planned change in some detail.

2. BASIC ASSUMPTIONS OF THE RDD MODEL

To begin with, it should be noted that other terms have been used to indicate models similar to the RDD paradigm. Examples of these are: the Centre-Periphery Model (Schon, 1971), Empirical-Rational Strategies (Chin and Benne, 1969), the Adoption Model (McNeil, 1977), Rational Planning Model (Lindquist, 1978) and the Coercive Methods (Hurst, 1983). Underlying these different terminologies is a common technological orientation towards change or innovation; this sets them apart from other models which stress the political or cultural perspective of change (for example, Schon, 1971; House, 1974, 1979).

The RDD paradigm, as I have said earlier, was the dominant conception of educational innovation during the 1960s, in the research community as well as government in the United States and Britain. Several versions of the RDD paradigm existed but the finest conceptualization, according to House (1979), was by Clark and Guba:

The so-called Clark-Guba 'model'...recognized four stages in the change process: **research, development, diffusion and adoption**. New knowledge that served as a basis for development, during the research stage. A solution to an operating problem was invented and built during the development stage. This innovation was introduced to practitioners in the diffusion stage. Finally, the innovation was incorporated into school systems in the adoption stage. Each stage was refined into sub-stages, and each sub-stage had criteria that the innovation should meet at that point.

was
advance

(House, 1979, pp.138-139).

Let us examine the RDD model further. Havelock (1971), in his review of the literature on the dissemination and utilization of knowledge, offers a three-model classification based on how their authors view the dissemination and utilization process. One of his three models is the RDD paradigm and he identifies five basic assumptions about change underlying this model. This model suggests, first of all, that dissemination and utilization is a rational sequence of activities, moving from research to development to packaging before dissemination takes place. Secondly, it is assumed that planning forms an important phase, and planning on a large scale, for the activities of research and development have to be coordinated. Thirdly, there has to be a division of labour, a separation of roles and functions. Fourth, it assumes the existence of a clearly defined target audience, a passive consumer at the end of the RDD chain who will adopt the innovation if it is delivered in the right way and at the right time. Fifth, this model recognizes that there has to be a high initial development cost prior to dissemination. It is assumed that the high cost will be offset by an even higher gain in the long run, in terms of efficiency, quality and capacity to reach a mass audience. Such a rationale, it is immediately recognizable to us, befits the expansion of industry.

Thus the RDD model views the process of change from the perspective of an external originator of innovation, beginning with the formulation of a problem on the basis of a presumed receiver need. The initiative in making this identification is taken by the developer. A great deal of emphasis is placed on the activity phases of the developer as he designs and develops a potential solution. Development is then followed by dissemination of the solution to the receiver. It can be seen that in the RDD model change is depicted as an orderly sequence; initiatives are taken by the 'experts' - researchers, developers and disseminators - while the receiver or target audience remains essentially passive. The model posits a user population that can be influenced through dissemination activities so long as dissemination is preceded by appropriate extensive research and development.

The main emphasis of all theorists in the RDD school is the planning of change on a large scale. It delineates innovation neatly into functional roles: extensive, scientific research followed by detailed development and testing, ending in dissemination activities. More than any other model of planned change, this model offers a rational division of labour. Hence the popularity of this model among macrosystem planners, particularly in Third World nations where there is a genuine concern - and sometimes a desperate need - to implement curriculum on a large scale

throughout the nation. In addition, the RDD model utilizes programmes, research and development projects from universities, regional laboratories and other institutions to develop an innovative package which is then disseminated to the 'consumers'. It is assumed that diffusion will be effective once consumers are aware of the potential benefit of an innovation. Very often the model calls for a facilitator who initially performs the role of a 'salesperson' and later performs a training role with school personnel. They, in turn, will train others, thus producing what is known as the 'multiplier effect'. We shall see later (in chapter 6) that KBSR is disseminated along a similar process.

I should like to comment further on the assumption of rationality inherent in the RDD model. Earlier it was thought reasonable to agree that we change on the basis of reason and evidence. Apply a rational process, therefore, to obtain a rational end. The corollary is that if the research is correct and the development sound, the proposed change will be accepted. This is usually the assumption which leads to heavy investment in basic and applied research. Havelock (1971) notes that such assumptions were at work in the research and development efforts of American Telephone and Telegraph. In Schon's (1971) Centre-Periphery Model, his classic example is the United States Agricultural Extension Programme, which succeeded in increasing

productivity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This has prompted MacDonald and Walker to remind us that 'as a piece of machinery, a novel curriculum is in many respects quite unlike a combine harvester' (MacDonald and Walker, 1976, p.13). In the same vein, Chin and Benne's (1976) Empirical-Rational Strategies are said to work best in diffusing 'thing technologies' in society rather than 'people technologies'. Yet the rational model has been used widely in schools, colleges, universities and other social institutions. As Lindquist observes, 'We formally act as if we all approach change rationally' (Lindquist, 1978, p.3). Surely the rational model is not fool-proof when applied to humans and social institutions. Predictably, dissatisfaction with the RDD model began to appear in the late 1960s.

3. CRITICISM OF THE RDD MODEL

'New ideas, in education as in life, travel hopefully: few of them actually arrive at their intended destinations' (Becher and Maclure, 1978, p.109). This statement may sound rather pessimistic, but the abundant literature on the implementation of educational innovation suggests that it has been much easier to propose new curricula than to accomplish curriculum implementation. This is especially true where the strategy for change employed is the RDD model, as was the case during the early days of the

curriculum development movement in the 1960s.

In the United States, curriculum developers initially concentrated on the planning, production, trial and revision of new curricular materials. It was assumed that because curriculum innovation was self-evidently good and intended to benefit the schools, there would be no problems in its implementation. Based on agricultural extension programmes, significantly, research evidence was produced to show that the dissemination of any innovation followed a peculiar S-curve: initially there would be a modest growth, then there would be a period of expansion, followed by a gradual trailing off to account for 'slow adopters' (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971). Several federal research laboratories and research and development centres were established and funded based on the RDD paradigm as its rationale. However, research and studies in the 1970s have demonstrated that the RDD approach has not led to successful implementation (for example, Goodlad and Klein, 1970). Despite all the research and development efforts and the large-scale funding, the educational products or packages created were not widely adopted by teachers in the schools. Goodlad and Klein, who looked for instances of educational innovation in practice by observing more than 150 classrooms in 67 schools, found that 'some of the highly recommended and publicised innovations of the past decade or so were dimly conceived and, at best, partially implemented in the schools claiming

them' (Goodlad and Klein, 1970, p.72). The Rand Corporation's Change Agent Study (1974-1978) on the innovative effects of federal programmes in the United States, which began to publish its findings in 1975, found- among other things- that projects designed by outsiders usually failed to gain support and outside consultants were not effective. The Rand studies emphasized the power of local communities in resisting or subverting the intent of federal programmes when their interests do not coincide.

In Britain the RDD paradigm was manifested in the many curriculum development projects supported by the Schools Council and characterised by the centre-periphery approach. Just as in the United States, curriculum developers at first expressed a great deal of optimism that the new curricula they developed would 'revolutionise English education' (Kerr, 1967). However, by the late 1960s it began to be evident that the expected adoption and implementation of curriculum innovations did not materialise. Some critics charged that the Schools Council had no influence on the school curriculum at all. What was even worse, in many cases when the 'consumers' did use the new curriculum it was 'subverted' and no longer reflected the original intentions of the developers (MacDonald and Walker, 1976). The Schools Council's Impact and Take-Up Project (Steadman, et al., 1980), which collected evidence on how far teachers have been influenced by its projects, observed that generally

less than a third of teachers in secondary schools using a project were making 'extensive use' of its ideas or materials. Commenting on this, Salter and Tapper state:

The fact of the matter is that the familiar constraints of lack of time and money, as well as the natural inertia of school organization, mean that teachers are much more likely to see Council project materials as a convenient, but occasional resource for teaching rather than as a package to be purchased wholesale...

(Salter and Tapper, 1981, p.127)

In this respect a parallel may be drawn with the ORACLE study which, based on observations of some sixty teachers and their primary school classrooms, concludes that despite much-publicised efforts to encourage progressive teaching in the 1960s and 1970s, the weight of evidence shows clearly that classroom practices remain largely traditional (Galton, et al., 1980). In any case, when it became evident in the late 1960s that events in classrooms were not much affected by curriculum packages, it was felt that the reason for the failure of the reform programmes could be faulty execution, so curriculum developers began to direct some of their attention to plans for dissemination. The original technological blueprint for curriculum change, the simple three-stage operation consisting of research, development and diffusion was modified slightly. In the words of MacDonald and Walker:

Once the curriculum reform movement got into 'third gear' the term 'diffusion', suggesting a natural social process of proliferation, gave way to the term 'dissemination', indicating planned pathways for the transmission of new educational ideas and practices from their point of

production to all locations of potential implementation.
(MacDonald and Walker, 1976, p.26).

Yet this reconceptualization of the third stage of the RDD model, from diffusion to dissemination, still implied a simple producer-consumer relationship and effectively there was no change in the original conceptualization. If anything, there seemed to be a hardening of position as consumers were defined as 'targets' and plans of 'attack' were drawn up, involving a change agent to represent the 'intentions' of the developers at the local level (Ibid, p.28). Schon's (1971) metaphor of battle seems to be relevant here. I might add that this language of war is most appropriate, seeing that the military - along with agriculture and industry - embraces the RDD model.

Disenchantment with the RDD model of change when applied to curriculum development and educational innovation generally, caused by its lack of impact or effectivity, has given rise to a great deal of criticisms. These criticisms range from dissatisfaction with its apparent neglect of school utilization of the new resources and the implementation of change, its confusion of diffusion with planned dissemination, criticism of the role of external experts, to the very idea of educational change as the uncritical acceptance of any other person's view of things (Skilbeck, 1984b). To be more specific, let me recapitulate the underlying assumptions of the RDD model and cite

instances where these have been denounced by the critics. The assumptions inherent in the model, as I have stated earlier, are: (a) rational sequence of activities; (b) massive planning; (c) division of labour; (d) high development costs; and (e) passive consumer as the target audience.

In the main, criticisms of the RDD model have been focused on its assumption of rationality, the research-develop-diffuse sequence, and the assumption that there is a passive consumer at the end of the line ready to implement change because it is self-evidently good (assumptions (a) and (e) above). The other three assumptions are occasionally and sometimes indirectly drawn into the argument. In criticising the model, Havelock (1971) has pointed out that it is over-rational, over-idealized, and excessively research-oriented, and it is especially inadequate as a model of change because it pays scant attention to the 'user'. Somewhat echoing this, Lindquist (1978) argues that rational systems may be good ways to research and develop change but they do not explain all the motivations and activities necessary for the actual use of planned change. He contends that an adequate strategy for change must include much more than clear and compelling reasons. 'Organizations, like the individuals and groups in them, do not operate simply as rational systems...If a change proposed threatens individual or group security and

status, it is in trouble no matter how elegant its reason' (Lindquist, 1978, p.4).

House (1974) has taken the RDD paradigm to task on three counts: its assumptions of rational sequence, passive consumer and division of labour. Explaining why the RDD paradigm does not 'work better', he puts forward the following argument:

.....use of the paradigm is justified on the basis of the belief that the practitioner is passive and will not initiate innovation on his own. The teacher is seen as slightly resistant, though someone who can be induced through persuasion to accept the new innovation...the developer is never able to take full cognizance of the practitioner's world since the innovation process always start on the R&D side. The heaviest attention is paid to marketing research. The R,D & D paradigm puts the practitioner immediately in the position of a consumer who is going to be sold a piece of goods.....[It] assumes that the innovation will be invented on the left, developed, and passed along the chain. But even assuming a passive consumer, such a sequence of events is unlikely...

(House, 1974,pp.223-224)

House contends that though the teacher does not usually initiate an innovation, he/she is the one who decides whether to use it or, more precisely, to what extent he/she will implement it; he/she has the option to buy or reject the proffered good, so to speak. Thus the teacher in the classroom has the ultimate power in educational innovation in that he can veto for him/herself, and this is something which rational planners generally overlook. On the question of division of labour and role specialization in the RDD

paradigm, House argues that this proposition is tenable only if there is a considerable social consensus, that the actors in the change process share the same values and ends in sight. It assumes that everyone is pursuing the same end and that the context is of no consequence. But, as House points out, such an assumption is far removed from reality. Very often researchers, developers and disseminators have different objectives and 'different actors can work at cross purposes with the overall scheme' (Ibid, p.224). The RDD paradigm, House insists, fails to take into account social interaction theory and has tried instead to impose a highly technocratic model based on role specialization, thus reducing the role of the teacher to a passive receiver of innovation.

Becher and Maclure (1978) who consider the reasoning behind the RDD approach to be 'intuitively attractive', nevertheless point out that at the stage of diffusion the weaknesses of this model are revealed most clearly. When teachers did not respond logically as they were expected to and countless classroom materials failed to carry the message, the validity of the RDD approach began to be questioned. The two authors cite critics who point out that the RDD model

embodied a highly technocratic set of assumptions. It assumed the existence of some central expertise not available to the average teacher... It assumed that learning materials could be engineered in the way that a new household product could...And above all it assumed

that knowledge was something that could be delivered in 'packages'...and was largely independent of personal interaction between teachers and taught.

(Becher and Maclure, 1978, pp.68-69)

Indeed, one of the explanations offered for the failure of educational innovations is the fact that, very often, the sources of innovation are external. It has often been pointed out that the curriculum reform movement of the 1960s was initiated by university professors interested in upgrading the quality of discipline-based teaching and state sponsorship preoccupied with producing better scientists and mathematicians in the aftermath of the successful launching of Sputnik by the Russians. In the words of Sarason, 'There are no grounds for assuming that any aspects of the impetus for change came from teachers, parents or children' (Sarason, 1971, p.36); that is to say that innovations were imposed on schools by external experts and not initiated by the people directly connected with the schools. It is generally believed that reforms failed partly because well-intentioned experts did not understand the realities of the classroom and had advanced abstract theories not related to practice. This problem arising out of externally designed innovation was not confined to the United States and Britain. In Canada, studies of the implementation of language arts curriculum and social studies curriculum, both of which are top-down or centre-periphery in nature, document the limitations of the new curricula (Fullan, 1982). In fact, implementing an educational innovation that

is externally initiated could be problematic even when the school personnel seemingly desire the change. This has been documented by Smith and Keith (1971) in their study of the implementation of open education in a new elementary school, open education having been 'adopted' at the request of key progressive personnel.

The earlier wave of curriculum development projects, based on the RDD paradigm, had emphasized the development of materials to influence curriculum change. The role of the teacher was thus slighted; he was expected to conform to the developer's plans and to use the packages unmodified. As Olson sees it, 'Insofar as the teacher was of concern, he was regarded as a subordinate element in a larger system whose chief functioning part was a set of curriculum materials. Teacher behaviour was just something to be managed' (Olson, 1977, p.61). This may sound like an exaggerated claim, yet in Britain one of the criticisms of the Schools Council was that it embodied a centre-periphery model of curriculum change: 'To many teachers the Council comes to define what is regarded as genuine innovation by those "up there" in authority rather than to promote and facilitate development at a local level...' (Richards, 1974, p.335). Likewise Taylor has criticised curriculum development based on the rational curriculum planning model as being 'out of tune with the emphases of some in-service training efforts, which are focused on changing the

curricular consciousness of the teacher, rather than providing him with materials for use' (Taylor, 1978,p.196).

Schon (1971) has criticised the centre-periphery model on two fronts. First, he postulates that it is a simple system which is prone to failure. The effectiveness of a centre-periphery system, according to Schon, depends on the level of resources at the centre, the number of points at the periphery, the length of the radii through which diffusion takes place, and the energy required to gain a new adoption. Since the process of diffusion is regulated by the centre, its effectiveness also depends upon the ways in which information flows back to the centre. Thus 'when the centre-periphery system exceeds the resources or the energy at the centre, overloads the capacity of the radii, or mishandles feedback from the periphery, it fails. Failure takes the form of simple ineffectiveness in diffusion, distortion of the message, or disintegration of the system as a whole' (Schon, 1971,p.79). I would say that this analysis of Schon's is an appropriate explanation for the failure of many large-scale educational innovations in the Third World (see, for example, Havelock and Huberman, 1977).

Secondly, Schon criticises the equation of 'diffusion' in the centre-periphery model with 'communication' as simple-minded. He argues that such a conception of diffusion

neglects the conflict generated by innovations of broad social significance, innovations which threaten the system as a whole. The appropriate metaphor for directed diffusion, Schon concludes, is 'battle' rather than 'communication'. This view is supported by House (1974), who sees educational change as a product of the interaction of factional groups vying for resources in attempts to influence and control one another. Both men in fact dismiss the classic rational model as no longer tenable and advance the thesis that politics and power relationships are important concepts in the analysis of the change process. The political perspective on innovation has also been supported by MacDonald and Walker (1976). The attempt to 'industrialise' the curriculum of the public schools, they say, has not been successful because it is 'premised on an unexamined assumption: that all of us concerned with the education of pupils - teachers, administrators, advisers, researchers, theorists - basically share the same educational values and have overlapping visions of curriculum excellence' (MacDonald and Walker, 1976, p.44). They argue that this is unrealistic for there is a great deal of conflict in society. Their proposition is that:

The process of curriculum dissemination, in so far as it assumes a stable message, does not occur. The process to which the term 'dissemination' is conventionally applied would be more accurately described by the term 'curriculum negotiation'.

(Ibid, p.43).

As we have seen, all too often curriculum change -and educational change generally - is approached as a highly systematic and rational process, particularly when it is initiated by external 'experts'. The inadequacies of this RDD approach have been explicated by several critics, some of whom I have cited in the foregoing pages. What remains is for me to look at the alternative paradigms.

4. ALTERNATIVE MODELS OF CHANGE

It can be said that in the RDD paradigm the route to change is through creating an excellent message or to argue an impressive case. But, as we have seen, the tales of failure have generated strong criticisms of the notion of teacher-proof curriculum materials. It is felt that isolating teachers from the development of curriculum, as was the case during the early wave of curriculum reform, was misconceived. One alternative model that has been adopted is the Social-Interaction (S-I) model. This gives due cognizance to the social networks within which we live. It has been argued that informal systems could be more effective than formal organizations in communicating new ideas. Social interaction researchers have found that personal communication and contact are often more persuasive in the dissemination of innovation than established, impersonal channels. The setting up of agricultural extension agencies as change agents and the

identification of 'opinion leaders' within the community are two ways in which social interaction theory has been successfully used in the United States as well as Third World countries, including Malaysia, to facilitate changes in agricultural practices. In the field of education, the first exemplars of the S-I strategy in the United Kingdom, according to Becher and Maclure (1978), were in the primary curriculum where teachers were free to develop child-centred approaches geared to the perceived needs and interests of individual pupils. Unlike the RDD model in which diffusion was originally neglected, in the S-I model dissemination is the central feature of the change process. I shall quote at some length from Becher and Maclure (1978) in order to provide an example of how the S-I model operates.

The Nuffield Junior Science and Mathematics teams decided at the outset to concentrate on teachers rather than pupils. They intended to describe and elaborate on the best of existing practice, but codify it only enough to make it reasonably coherent, and to set up local networks of teachers who could then help each other to adapt and develop the results.

Thus, instead of being a highly expert materials-producing group..., the central team of the social-interaction model becomes a servicing agency drawing on, and disseminating, expertise which is already available in the system. Clearly defined curricular objectives for teaching particular subjects are no longer sought: it is assumed that teachers will determine their own goals, in relation to local circumstance. In consequence, published materials often provide no more than illustrative classroom activities for pupils, and focus predominantly on background information which the teachers themselves may require. The development process concentrates on finding ways whereby teachers may be helped to develop their own curricula.

(Becher and Maclure, 1978, p.70)

However, the S-I model has its own limitations too. Notable among these is the false assumption that every teacher has the time, the talents and the motivation to take an active part in the development of new teaching approaches and materials. Particularly in Third World countries where, as in Malaysia, the number of children in a class can be as high as fifty, it is surely unrealistic to expect the teacher - whose professional training leaves much to be desired in the first place - to participate in a S-I process of change.

Another common alternative to the RDD model is the Problem-solving (P-S) model. In this model the process of change is initiated by the practitioner him/herself by identifying an area of concern or a need for change. S/he may undertake to alter the situation through^{her/}his own efforts or may seek assistance from outside; more often external resources, whether individual, groups or organizations, are utilized to assist in bringing about change. In fact the P-S model recognizes that for change to take place it must be based firmly on the practitioner's needs, but the practitioners should be given substantial support from the centre. The external change agent in this model acts as a resource consultant, collaborating with the 'client' rather than the 'receiver' or 'consumer' of the RDD model. MacDonald and Walker have noted that 'a critical dimension of variance among the three models is the degree of

compliance ascribed to the so-called 'receiver' and, by association, the degree of control over the change process exerted by outsiders seeking to introduce new ideas' (MacDonald and Walker. 1976, p.11).

The P-S model, like the earlier models, is not without its limitations. Its main difficulty is embodied in the very conception of a problem-solving approach. It implies that the practitioner is a reflective professional who will be able to identify problems and is sufficiently motivated to want to solve these problems. I would contend that the situation in Third World countries is a far cry from this. Alternatively, this model implies that there is a close investigation of each client school's particular needs and working out solutions to meet these needs. Again, the limited resources available for curriculum development would pose a barrier to the establishment of a close client-consultant relationship between development teams and individual schools. Nevertheless in western European countries generally the current emphasis is on school-based and project-based work with a high measure of teacher involvement (Taylor, 1978). This reflects the conviction of many people that the planned downward or top-down sequence of research-development-diffusion has not been successful. Lawrence Stenhouse (1975), one of the most trenchant critics of the RDD approach in curriculum studies, seems to have taken the P-S model a step further. For Stenhouse, research

is every teacher's responsibility, therefore he has proposed a Research Model for curriculum change; no longer are teachers mere recipients of other people's curriculum materials.

5. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In this chapter I have advanced that the early curriculum intervention efforts of the 1960s adopted the RDD model of change simply because it was the only model available at that time. I then examined the basic assumptions of the RDD model, noting particularly its assumption of rationality and the fact that it isolates curriculum development from its audience, the practitioners whose ideas and behaviours are supposed to be changed. Criticisms of the model as advanced by some prominent theorists are cited and in a few cases such criticisms have been substantiated by research evidence indicating the failure of the RDD model. Finally I have looked briefly at alternative models that have been offered arising out of the difficulties and limitations of the RDD model.

The literature on curriculum change models have, in the main, been based on the experiences of the industrialised nations of the West. When applied to the Third World these models leave much to be desired. There is a certain kind of particularity about educational changes in the Third World

which differentiates them from those experienced in the West. For one thing, the need for change is nation-wide, so that the focus has to be large-scale, macro-system planning, and as the need for change is often very urgent, there is no time for incremental changes. Secondly, Third World countries generally have centralised education systems with a hierarchical educational structure. This is very different from the situation in Britain where traditionally education has been under the control of Local Education Authorities, with power shared with the teachers themselves. Third, most teachers in the Third World lack professional training and some have no training at all, unlike the graduate workforce in the teaching profession in Britain. I have spoken of the importance of teacher autonomy in the previous chapter. Clearly untrained and inadequately trained teachers do not enjoy such an autonomy. Thus, while undeniably the RDD model has its limitations, it seems to me that conditions in Malaysia, and possibly in the Third World generally, render the proffered alternative models inappropriate as well.

I should like to recapitulate what I have advanced in this thesis so far. First of all I have argued that the New Primary School Curriculum in Malaysia (KBSR) could be interpreted as a move towards child-centred education at the primary level. Then I presented an account of child-centred education in the United States and England, noting

particularly the historical and political conditions in which it developed and, to a lesser extent, declined. My conclusion was that several conditions are necessary for the practice of child-centred education, notably teacher-professionalism and the autonomy that goes with it. This was followed, in this chapter, by an examination of the RDD model of change; it appears that despite its limitations, which make it no longer tenable in the West, conditions peculiar to the Third World would make RDD - or perhaps centre-periphery is a more appropriate term here - the only choice for a model of change. In other words, the appropriateness of alternative models, such as the P-S model currently favoured in the western world, may not be generalizable to Third World countries. Yet this is not to say that the version of RDD model as practised in Malaysia is not unproblematic; on the contrary it is my hunch that the top-down, centre-periphery approach employed in the implementation of child-centred education in Malaysia has contributed towards some of its ensuing problems. But this remains to be seen in the empirical data, to be presented later. In the meantime, in the next chapter I propose to examine the Malaysian educational context for change.

CHAPTER IV

THE MALAYSIAN CONTEXT

The education system of a developing nation very often reflects its political and socio-cultural climate. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Malaysia, where there is a marked difference between the education system prevalent during the colonial period and the one it unswervingly pursues now. Although Malaysia does not fall within the United Nations' classification of 'Least Developed Countries' (LDCs), at the time independence was achieved in 1957 it certainly shared one of the characteristics of the LDCs with regard to education. As observed by Colton (1983), upon gaining independence many of the LDCs

inherited systems of education which were not only irrelevant, but in many instances ran counter to the needs of local social structures, economies, traditional cultures and national goals. These inherited structures were generally rigid, hierarchical, highly centralised academic systems. They selected and trained an elite in the skills necessary to work in the 'modern' sector in order to best utilize local resources for the good of the colonising country.

(Colton, 1983, p. 3)

In order to fully appreciate the magnitude of the 'education problem' facing Malaysia and to comprehend the rationale underlying its present education policy, this chapter will begin by taking a brief look at some relevant historical factors. This is followed by a more detailed account of education during the British colonial rule, and subsequently

the development of the national education system during the post-independent period. The present administrative structure of education is important enough to form another section in this chapter, as I hope it will further clarify one of the issues mentioned in the previous chapter, namely the necessary adoption of the RDD model of change. Finally this chapter examines the principles and practice of teacher education in Malaysia; this is to substantiate my point regarding the lack of professionalism and teacher autonomy among Malaysian teachers particularly at the primary level, professionalism and teacher autonomy being qualities which I have contended earlier are important for the successful implementation of a child-centred curriculum.

1. A BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Malaysia as a federation dates from 1963. At its inception the Malaysian federation comprised Peninsular Malaysia (formerly known as Malaya, with eleven constituent states that formed a Federation in 1948), Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak. By an agreement signed in August 1965, Singapore ceased to be a part of Malaysia and became an independent republic. As it now stands, therefore, Malaysia is a federation of thirteen states covering an area of 330,434 square kilometres. Its population is estimated at 15.8 million for 1985; of these 82.1 percent reside in Peninsular Malaysia, 8.1 percent in Sabah and 9.8 percent in Sarawak

(Govt. of Malaysia, 1986, p. 128). The Malaysian society is multi-racial in character. The bumiputras or indigenous peoples - including principally the Malays and, in Sabah and Sarawak, the Kadazans and Dayaks - account for 60 percent of the population, Chinese for 30.9 percent and Indians for 8.4 percent (Ibid, p. 129). But this plural society is of relatively recent origin. Over a century ago the overwhelming majority of the population in Malaya were Malays, but by the first decade of the twentieth century the Malays had been reduced to only 55 percent of the population, with Chinese and Indians forming 35 percent and 10 percent respectively (Ness, 1967, p. 39). A British historian noted: 'In 1800 the Malays had made up some 90 percent of the population of Malaya and in 1880 still two-thirds. By 1911, when the first census covering all Malaya [including Singapore] was taken, they were 51 percent only' (Gullick, 1969, p. 74). This came about as a consequence of British colonial policy in Malaya.

British interest and administrative policy in Malaya were mainly dictated by economic considerations. It was to safeguard trade with China that the island of Penang was acquired from the Sultan of Kedah in 1786. This was followed by the so-called 'founding' of Singapore in 1819 by Sir Stamford Raffles, who seemed to have foreseen the prospect of its growth as a centre for entrepot trade. In 1824 the British secured the ancient port of Melaka, the

seat of the Malay Sultanate during its Golden Age in the fifteenth century. With that the three important ports of the Malay Peninsula came under British rule and they were merged to form an administrative unit known as the Straits Settlements in 1826. From then on the British steadily extended its administration to the mainland, beginning with the tin-rich state of Perak whose sultan was obliged to sign a treaty, in 1874, agreeing 'to receive and provide a suitable residence for a British officer, to be called Resident, who shall be accredited to his Court and whose advice must be asked and acted upon in all questions other than those touching Malay religion and custom' (Swettenham, 1929, pp. 173-174). It should be noted that the British advance was effected at a most opportune time - when the Malay Sultanates were in a period of decline. Thus despite pockets of resistance from the Malays, by capitalizing on the situation that arose in the Malay states the British were able to establish themselves as the colonial masters of the whole of Malaya by 1914. The states of Sabah and Sarawak in East Malaysia became British Protectorates in 1888 under almost similar circumstances*.

* Due to the dearth of literature on Sabah and Sarawak presently, the following historical account centres mainly on Peninsular Malaysia.

It was British economic interests that led to the creation of a plural society in Malaya. The development of the tin and rubber industries, two commodities which commanded a ready market in Europe and America, necessitated recruiting large numbers of labourers and the British administration turned to China and India for a large-scale supply of cheap labour. It was relatively easy to attract labour from China as its south-eastern part had limited resources and suffered severe population pressure on the arable land available. Thus large numbers of Chinese emigrated to Malaya in search of a better livelihood at the tin mines until the recession of the 1930s compelled the British administration to enforce restrictions. As for the Indians, they were recruited to provide cheap labour for the rubber plantations and in the construction of roads and railways. Many of them came under an 'assisted scheme' - their passage to Malaya was paid by their prospective employers or the Indian Immigration Committee. The immigrant Chinese and Indians brought with them their own languages, customs and religious beliefs which were quite different from those of the Malays. In view of these deep-rooted cultural and religious differences, social integration ^{of the three ethnic groups seemed to be out} of the question. Ness (1967) summarised the situation aptly when he stated:

They are brought together at the market place through common interests, and there they can be found in communication in the bazaar Malay [language] that has become the lingua franca of Malaya. However in their occupational specialization, in their widely different languages and style of life, and in their religious differences, one can see the power of the forces that separate them.

(Ness, 1967, p. 39)

In addition, it has been observed that 'the colonial social system was a system in essential equilibrium. The elements of that system - the dependent state, the colonial export economy, and the ethnic plural society - fit together with a minimum of strain and a maximum of mutual support' (Ibid, p. 23).

Recent analysts and historians (example, Ibrahim, 1978; Malik, 1980) have challenged the validity of 'development' in Malaya during the colonial period as portrayed by Western historians. As Malik (1980) persuasively argues, the written history during the British period generally focused on the activities of the immigrants, changes in administration and the development of facilities in the 'newly developed urbanised belt'. What was felt and experienced by the indigenous population was given little attention historically. While the British and a large number of the immigrants they imported enjoyed economic prosperity - as did most immigrants in other parts of colonised Asia such as Burma, Indonesia and Vietnam - the indigenous Malays were hardly affected by the enormous

riches in the country. Furthermore, Malik points out, Western historians generally did not even know the language of the society they studied and tended to interpret events through the perception of officers in the British civil service. Thus he concludes that the colonial 'development' of Malaya was a 'myth' (Malik, 1980, pp. 101-104). To this may be added the observation of others that when Malaya achieved independence in 1957, one of the colonial legacies was that the Malayan economy was merely a geographic region suitable for certain economic operations within the British monetary as well as political framework.

The divisive character of colonial Malaya had the effect of inhibiting the growth of national solidarity or movement towards independence before the Second World War. The indigenous Malays, the only section of the population who regarded Malaya as their home, had developed a sense of national consciousness especially when the movement toward political independence gathered momentum in other parts of colonised Asia. They were, however, hampered by the fact that they were the weakest community economically. The political sentiments of the Chinese and Indian immigrants, who initially looked upon the country merely as a prosperous transit centre, were not conducive to Malayan patriotism. The turning point came during the Second World War when Britain surrendered power in the region to the Japanese in 1942. The Japanese occupation lasted for only three years

but when the British, on regaining control of the region, tried to secure even more powers than before through the setting up of the Malayan Union - taking away most of what remained of the independence of the separate Malay States and even the rulers' control over the customs of the Malays (Silcock and Aziz, 1953) - they were met with a strong resistance from the Malays who by then had organized an effective political party, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO). Subsequently there came the demand for self-government from UMNO in the early 1950s. It was at this juncture that the other communities felt the need to be involved in Malayan politics. As Myrdal (1968) observes:

The fear that a politically dominant Malay community in an independent Malaya might threaten the economic interests of other ethnic groups prompted the wealthier sections of the Chinese and Indian communities to form their own political organizations. In other words, the prospective departure of the British stirred Malaya into political consciousness, but along communal lines.

(Myrdal, 1968, p. 160)

Continued pressure from the Malay nationalists on the British government finally led to Malaya gaining independence within the Commonwealth in August 1957. The new constitution for independent Malaya, based on the recommendations of a commission of constitutional experts from Commonwealth countries, had taken into account the disparate Malayan society. Citizenship requirements were revised to allow more resident Chinese and Indians the franchise and in addition those born in the country after

independence were automatically regarded as Malayan citizens. For the Malays, their 'special rights' in matters such as land tenure were to continue indefinitely, with responsibility for their preservation and periodic review vested in the Head of State. This constitutional formula aroused grievances from sections of the Malays as well as the non-Malays, both sides charging that too much was given to the other. However, in attempting to balance ethnic sponsorship for the Malays against civil rights for the non-Malays and thereby to reduce the glaring political and economic differences among the communities, it can be said that the new constitution was devised to meet at least their basic aspirations.

The development of Malaya since independence - later known as Malaysia when the eastern states of Sabah and Sarawak joined the federation in 1963 - whether in the field of politics, economics or education, has always revolved around the perceived need to unite its multi-ethnic population. A point that needs to be noted is that income differentials have acquired exceptional social and political significance in Malaysia. Various types of income differentials (agricultural-nonagricultural, rural-urban, interstate) correlate with ethnic economic imbalances and this has accentuated the problem of inequality in the country. Communal discontent and antagonism finally led to the outbreak of inter-communal clashes in 1969, thus pushing

the problem of economic disparities to the fore; for while the Malaysian per capita income was among the highest in Asia, the two major problems facing the country, namely the share of the Malay community in the economy and the problem of rural poverty, continued to persist. Increasing concern with these two problems led the Government to formulate the national ideology, known as Rukunegara, and the New Economic Policy. The former declares, among other things, the nation's dedication to achieving a greater unity of all her peoples, to maintaining a democratic way of life and to creating a just society (the full text of Rukunegara is provided in Appendix I). The latter in essence sought for the disadvantaged indigenous community a greater participation in all sectors of the modern economy. These two documents have become the bases, or at least have permeated, subsequent plannings in Malaysia whether in the field of economics or education. Thus it is important that any attempt to study current problems and issues in Malaysia should take into account its historical background.

2. EDUCATION DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD

The education that emerged during the colonial period in Malaya can be broadly classified into two: vernacular education and English education. The former was represented by Malay schools, Chinese schools and Tamil schools found mainly in the rural areas. English schools, that is schools

using English as the medium of instruction, were found in the urban areas where there was a concentration of immigrant groups.

Several documents, such as the reports and correspondence of colonial officials serving in Malaya, reveal the nature and purpose of the colonial educational policy. Education was recognized as a 'sacred duty' on the part of the British government, particularly for the 'natives'. It was emphasized that elementary education was to be provided in the vernacular and priority was to be given to the indigenous population in the rural areas. The teaching of English to the children of the local people was criticized, but at the same time its usefulness in producing 'intelligent, diligent and honest servants to work for the company' (the East India Company) was acknowledged. It was pointed out that despite 'a liberal expenditure' the Government could not possibly provide the means of educating the whole country, so voluntary efforts by individuals and missionaries to set up schools were to be encouraged (Chelliah, 1960, pp. 20-22). This colonial policy resulted in parallel systems of schooling: vernacular schools providing elementary education for the rural Malays, established and maintained by the Government; Chinese and Tamil vernacular schools set up by the Chinese and Indian communities respectively; and English schools maintained by the Government and Christian missionary bodies, providing an

English-oriented education for the mixed urban population.

The earliest English schools in Malaysia were set up by Protestant missionaries , with the sole purpose of teaching elementary reading and writing in English as well as arithmetic. But as the number of English schools increased the curriculum began to reflect the economic trend of the period. Every English school was, in a sense, a commercial or vocational school, because it was attended by children who studied the language for its commercial value. The Cambridge Local Examination was introduced in 1891 and for a long time graduates from English schools with the Cambridge certificate were assured of highly-paid employment. The training of efficient clerks for the bureaucracy was an important goal to be achieved by the urban English schools, and as British economic interests in the region expanded further technical, agricultural and trade schools were later established (Ness, 1964; Ibrahim Ahmad, 1980). It is important to note that these English schools were established only in the developed urbanised belt where the immigrants congregated. As the bulk of the Malays lived in rural areas, they were virtually excluded from this education system which was recognized as having an economic value. Furthermore, the fact that several of the English schools were managed by missionaries posed a further barrier to the Muslim Malays. Malik (1980) observes that there were

Anglo-Chinese and Anglo-Tamil schools built in British Malaya but there was never any effort to build an Anglo-Malay school. When the British administration finally set up an English school for the Malays, this boarding school - patterned on the English Public School - was to cater for the children of the Malay nobility and the graduates of the Malay College, as it was called, were absorbed into the colonial bureaucracy and were thus less likely to challenge the special position of the colonial rulers (Malik, 1980, pp. 113-114).

Turning now to the Malay school, the first such school was set up in 1821 in Penang. The Malays have had formal education even before they came into contact with the West but the education given then was religious in character. Thus when secular education was introduced by the British in the nineteenth century, one of the problems faced was the difficulty of getting teachers who were able to teach reading and writing in the Malay language and to teach arithmetic. As regards classrooms, initially the Government found it convenient to use the buildings in which Koranic/religious lessons were carried out. The establishment of an Education Department in 1872 resulted in more Malay schools being built. By 1920 the Annual Report of the Federated Malay States noted that 'the awakening of the Malay race to the advantages of education, vernacular or English, has been rapid and widespread. Education is the

daily topic of the Malay press' (cited in Gullick, 1969, p. 260); and by 1945 the demand for education had almost trebled the enrolment in Malay schools.

As noted earlier, the British Government felt morally obliged to provide elementary education for the Malays as the indigenous people of the country. Yet despite this outwardly benevolent attitude, official British policy towards Malay education was to support only the teaching of minimal literacy (four years of primary schooling) and some occupational skills perceived as appropriate for a fishing or farming community. Several documents written throughout the British rule in Malaya testify to the nature and purpose of the education that was to be given to the Malays. I shall list below some of those that have been cited by Awang Had (1979); for the sake of brevity and simplicity I shall give only the dates of these Reports/Minutes/Speeches rather than the full source, the dates being important to indicate that this 'attitude' was consistently adhered to.

Vernacular education is the teaching of Malay boys to read and write Malay, Arithmetic, Geography and Romanised Malay. This much education teaches them to be regular, obedient and cleanly.....(1898)

You can teach your Malays so that they remain in the padi-fields and so that they do not lose their skill and craft in fishing and jungle work. Teach them the dignity of manual labour, so that they do not all become Kranis [clerks], and I am sure that you will not have the trouble which has arisen in India through over-education. (1915)

The aim of the Government is not to turn out a few well-educated youths, nor a number of less well-educated boys; rather it is to improve the bulk of the people and to make the son of the fisherman or the peasant a more intelligent fisherman or peasant than his father had been, and a man whose education will enable him to understand how his own lot in life fits in with the scheme of life around him. (1920)

Our policy in regard to the Malay peasants is to give them as good an education as can be obtained in their own language. The last thing that we want to do is to take them away from the land (1928). The removal of illiteracy and the teaching of elementary agriculture together with clean and healthy methods of living must be the aim and object of all vernacular schools. (1931)

The education of the Malays was limited to the primary level, with a curriculum that included gardening and basket-weaving, right to the time independence was achieved. Thus rather than promote social advancement, the colonial desire to retain its political power in the Malay states seems to have necessitated using education as an apparatus of social control - the Malays were to be taught to be obedient, diligent, accept their lot without questioning and above all to remain in their villages. The plight of Malay education can further be seen by the fact that during the first decade of the twentieth century, though English schools formed only about 6 percent of the total number of 310 schools in the Federated Malay States, more than 50 percent of the Government expenditure on education was allocated to these English schools (Malik, 1980). A more tolerant analysis of the British educational policy could perhaps argue that it was the 'romantics' in the colonial officers that sought to

keep the Malays to the villages, just as several private schools in England were deliberately set up in the country. But there is no evidence to support such a contention. On the contrary, there is evidence to suggest that when a British official expressed a genuine desire to advance the cause of the Malays, his position was in peril. One such official was O.T. Dussek, a graduate of Eastbourne College, University of London; he was appointed^P Principal of the Sultan Idris Training College (SITC) in 1920 and from 1924 he was 'Assistant Director of Education in charge of Malay Schools' as well. He was known to have stirred up the sentiments of the Malay teacher trainees at the College through his speeches urging them to be aware of their fate and encouraging them to improve their social status. He was 'pensioned off' while on leave in England in September 1936 and he was not even fifty then. Another employee, a Malay Assistant Inspector of Schools who was active in nationalist movements in the 1920s, was removed from his post in the Education Service and offered a post in a department in charge of the elimination of secret societies (Awang Had, 1979). On the whole, through their education policy the British were successful in delaying the social awakening of the Malays, for the seeds of discontent began to appear only in the 1920s, especially at the SITC. It cannot be denied that their policy had the effect of stagnating the Malay society for a long time rather than advancing it.

Chinese vernacular schools were set up by the Chinese immigrants themselves. Many of the teachers in these schools were born and educated in China, and the textbooks used were also imported from China. Needless to say there was nothing 'Malayan' in the curriculum of these schools. The British government initially accepted no financial responsibility for these schools. However, when the activities of these schools became revolutionary and posed a threat to the Government, measures were taken to institute a system of inspection and control over them. From 1924 onwards modest grants were made towards the cost of running these schools.

Tamil vernacular schools in Malaya began to be set up in 1870s wherever there were estates employing Indian labourers. The Labour Code of 1923 made it compulsory for estate owners to provide primary education for the children of labourers; this resulted in the setting up of more Tamil schools. In 1930 the Government appointed an officer to inspect these schools and to direct their work. However, Tamil vernacular education shared with Malay education the fate of being confined to the primary level, with no possibility of advancement for its pupils. They remained in the estates, ensuring a steady supply of cheap labour for the management.

Thus parallel system of schooling existed in Malaya right up to the Second World War and accentuated the divisive character of the society. In the 1950s the Government took a greater interest in Malaya's educational requirements. Under pressure from the Malays a committee was set up in 1950 under the chairmanship of an Oxford scholar, L.J. Barnes, to investigate and to improve education for the Malays. The Barnes Report published in 1951 recommended the establishment of a national school system in which all ethnic groups were to be taught together, with only Malay and English as the media of instruction. This aroused a great deal of suspicion and hostility among the Chinese, who claimed that it was intended 'to change Chinese into Malays' (Silcock and Aziz, 1953, p. 338). The Government then appointed a Committee on Chinese Education. Its report, known as the Fenn-Wu Report, recommended the preservation of Chinese schools but its curriculum was to be Malaya-oriented rather than be based on syllabuses and textbooks imported from China.

The divergent views expressed in the two Reports strained relationship between the Malays and Chinese further. The content of the Reports was hotly debated throughout the country and this placed the colonial Government in an awkward position. The Education Ordinance of 1952 was in essence a compromise of the different views. It provided for a National School System in which Malay would be the

medium of instruction and a National-type system in which English would be the medium of instruction. Facilities for the teaching of Chinese or Tamil would be provided if requested by the parents/guardians of at least fifteen pupils. In addition, Malay as the national language of the country would be taught in Chinese and Tamil schools through the introduction of National Language classes, and English would also be taught in all schools. However, the implementation of this scheme was hampered by the shortage of teachers to teach English and Malay and by financial constraints, as priority was given to economic development and the war against the communists during the 1950s.

In 1955 Malaya held its first General Elections. The Alliance government that came into power, fulfilling its pledge to the electorate, immediately set up a committee to study the education problem. Its terms of reference were very different from those of the education committees formed earlier. This committee under the chairmanship of Dato' Abdul Razak, the Minister of Education, was to examine the education system

..... with a view to establishing a national system of education acceptable to the people of the Federation as a whole, which will satisfy their needs and promote their cultural, social, economic and political development as a nation, having regard to the intention to make Malay the national language of the country whilst preserving and sustaining the growth of the languages and cultures of other communities living in the country.

(Razak Report, 1956, p.1)

This reflected the belief of the newly-elected, multi-racial government that education could be used as an apparatus for nation-building. The Report of the Education Committee 1956, commonly referred to as the Razak Report, made a total of seventeen recommendations. Among its more important recommendations were:

- Conversion of existing primary schools to Standard Schools (Malay medium) and Standard-Type Schools (Chinese, Tamil and English medium).
- Malay and English to be compulsory subjects for all primary and secondary schools.
- Establishment of one type of National Secondary Schools open to all races by competitive selection and with a common syllabus, a flexible curriculum permitting the study of all Malayan languages and cultures and room for diversity in the media of instruction.
- Orientation of schools to a Malayan outlook by the introduction of common content syllabuses and time-tables for school.

The scheme conscientiously and carefully constructed by the Razak Committee finally gained acceptance as a workable formula for national integration and development, and was duly enacted as the Education Ordinance 1957. The Razak

Report, in effect, paved the way for the development of a national education policy after the achievement of independence.

3. POST-INDEPENDENCE: CONSOLIDATION OF THE NATIONAL EDUCATION SYSTEM

When Malaya became independent in 1957, the first task of the newly-elected government was to unite its multi-racial society. As noted earlier, the most obvious evidence of ethnic compartmentalization was found in the disparate education system in which each community was confined to its own particular school. Thus the Razak Report had pronounced, 'We believe that the ultimate objective of educational policy in Malaya must be to bring together the children of all races under a national education system' (Razak Report, 1956, p. 3). Since education was regarded as 'our country's investment in the future', the Alliance government proceeded to specify output targets and allotted funds accordingly. 'Through intensive investment, improvisation where necessary, and an accent on quantity rather than quality, the target of a primary school place for every child of the eligible age group [who requested for schooling] was obtained by 1958 school year, two years ahead of plan' (Rudner, 1975, p. 45).

Further development in Education occurred in 1959 when the Government appointed an Education Review Committee. Its report issued in 1960, generally known as the Rahman Talib Report after its chairman, was accepted and its recommendations translated into policy by the Education Act of 1961. This Report incorporated the spirit and the principles of the earlier Razak Report, and with it the current National Education Policy can be said to have come into being. The major change in 1961 was the integration of Chinese secondary schools into the national secondary school system with the use of Malay or English as the medium of instruction. Other recommendations of the Report included the introduction of free primary education, Assessment Examination at the end of the fifth year of primary schooling and the setting up of the Federal Inspectorate.

In 1965 the Malayan Secondary School Entrance Examination was abolished. This meant that all children who had completed six years of primary schooling were offered places in secondary schools to continue their education for at least three more years. Thus nine years of education was made available to all children. The year 1967 saw the passing of the National Language Act which made Malay the sole official language of the country while other languages were to be used only on grounds of practicality. However, this did not really guarantee the actual transition to a

Malay medium school system, and even three years later the real extent of usage of Malay in government and education was still limited. Many Malays felt dissatisfied with the language policy and the persistent economic disparities in the country. The Chinese, on their part, were unhappy that their language seemed to have been relegated to a less important status. These various grievances finally led to communal clashes in 1969. This tragedy prompted the government to conduct an intensive review of its policies and priorities. It seemed clear that despite its concern for uniting the peoples, the government's earlier programmes had resulted mainly in increasing the growth of the economy, and that past development efforts did not deal sufficiently with the needs of the poor and the imbalances among ethnic groups, so that divisiveness continued to persist. The government's conclusion was:

National unity is unattainable without greater equity and balance among Malaysia's social and ethnic groups in their participation in the development of the country and in the sharing of the benefits from modernization and economic growth. National unity cannot be fostered if vast sections of the population remain poor.....

(Govt. of Malaysia, 1971, pp. 3-4)

Arising out of its critical evaluation of past policies and approaches, the government formulated a national ideology, known as Rukunegara, as the basis for national unity. A New Economic Policy (NEP) was pronounced, declaring the government's intention to eradicate poverty among all groups and to restructure the Malaysian society in order 'to reduce

and eventually eliminate the identification of race with economic function' (Ibid, p. v). Since then successive five-year Malaysia Plans have reiterated the government's commitment to achieving socio-economic justice and national unity.

Within the context of Rukunegara (the National Ideology), education is regarded as one of the important strategies towards integrating the multi-ethnic population. A Ministry of Education publication lists one of the three aims of education as: 'to unite the various races together so that a united Malaysian nation will evolve' (Ministry of Education, 1970, p. 50). Similarly the Second Malaysia Plan (1971-1975) pointed to the need to consolidate the education system in order to promote national integration and unity through programmes such as (a) the implementation, in stages, of Bahasa Malaysia (the Malay language) as the main medium of instruction, and (b) closing the gap in educational opportunities among regions and races. The last fifteen years or so has been a period of rapid development in education, both quantitatively and to a lesser extent qualitatively. The Cabinet Committee Report (1979) reviewed the implementation of the National Education Policy and it came up with 173 recommendations, some of which, like the New Primary School Curriculum (KBSR), are currently being implemented. It is against this backdrop of the nation's commitment to achieving unity among its peoples that I shall

attempt to analyse some aspects of KBSR later.

The significant role to be played by education in the task of nation-building simply cannot be over-emphasized. The belief that education can, through the younger generation of Malaysians, contribute towards the achievement of national unity is translated into practice especially by the provision of (a) common schooling - a common curriculum, a common language of instruction (except at the primary level where Chinese and Tamil are still used beside Bahasa Malaysia) and common public examinations, and (b) improved educational opportunities, including the provision of financial assistance and other facilities for disadvantaged groups. Recognizing that 'there are divergent forces that need to be harnessed positively to sustain and strengthen society' (Ministry of Education, 1982, p. 6), Malaysia's philosophy of education is derived from the National Education Policy and Rukunegara, and is reflected in the following statements on education:

- (a) Education caters for the optimum development of individual potentialities (physical, intellectual, moral, emotional, socio-cultural and aesthetic development) to ensure meaningful survival within the framework of societal needs and demands.
- (b) At societal level, formal education in Malaysia is viewed as an instrument for achieving national unity and providing manpower with appropriate education and training for national development.
- (c) Education is also responsible for the preservation, the development and transmission of national culture and heritage.

(Ibid)

Within the framework of education for national unity, Islamic Religious Knowledge as a subject is compulsory for all Muslim students while non-Muslim students are taught Moral Education. The main objective of religious and moral education is 'to build a strong basis for developing a disciplined society with high moral values' (Govt. of Malaysia., 1981, p. 354). In addition, co-curricular activities, such as games and membership of societies, also form an important component in the school curriculum. Stressing this at a National Union of Teaching Profession Conference, the Minister of Education said:

If we only concern ourselves with the sole aim of providing pupils with an [academic] education, then we cannot be sure of having instilled the correct behaviour and positive attitudes required of them as responsible members of society. This is why co-curricular activities are vital and will not only ensure a balanced all-round education but also integrate the different races.

(New Straits Times, 14.4.86)

Thus education is central in Malaysian politics. Since independence, and more so after the communal clashes of 1969, politicians have looked upon it as a valuable asset in striving towards national unity. It is a measure of the priority given to education that expenditure on it constitutes a significant proportion of the total national budget. In the year 1978, for instance, its share of the total budget was 17 percent, a considerably high figure when compared to some other Third World countries: the corresponding figures for Indonesia and Brazil were 11

percent and 12.4 percent respectively (World Bank documents, cited in Ministry of Finance, 1981).

4 THE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE AND SCHOOL SYSTEM

In Malaysia the centralization of education seems inevitable; this was the practice during the colonial period but the need for central control was all the greater once independence was achieved, in view of the government's conviction that education can be used as an apparatus to integrate its multi-ethnic population. As indicated earlier, educational planning has always been an integral part of successive, five-year development Plans. Thus the centralization of education in Malaysia is not merely a perpetuation of the colonial policy but also a practice rationalised by its urgent need to achieve national unity. In addition, it might be said that scarcity of resources - as experienced in most Third World countries - makes central planning a more sensible choice economically. As noted in the Cabinet Committee Report (1979), 'The centralized management system ensures optimal use of physical resources and available expertise in the education sector as well as prevent wasteful duplication of duties' (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1979a, p. 141).

Responsibility for the administration of the entire education system, then, rests with the Ministry of

Education. Its administrative machinery exists at four hierarchical levels: national, state, district or division, and school levels. I shall refer briefly to these four levels below in order to highlight their hierarchical relationship:

The National level, represented by the Ministry, is at the top of the hierarchy. Within the Ministry, the highest decision-making body is the Educational Planning Committee (EPC) chaired by the Minister of Education. This committee addresses its functions and deliberations to the need for overall planning, to evolve procedures for coordinating the efforts of the different units in the Ministry, and to bring these in line with the development goals and objectives of the nation. Other important committees at the national level are: the Central Curriculum Committee (CCC), responsible for formulating curriculum policies and determining their implementation; the Finance Committee which controls matters related to finance and expenditure; and the Development Committee formed in 1976 to ensure that the process of planning and the implementation of physical development are carried out smoothly and efficiently. More importantly, this Committee ensures 'that development plans for education are implemented in accordance with the Education Act, 1961..... so as to achieve the government's primary objectives of national unity' (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1979, p. 130). The

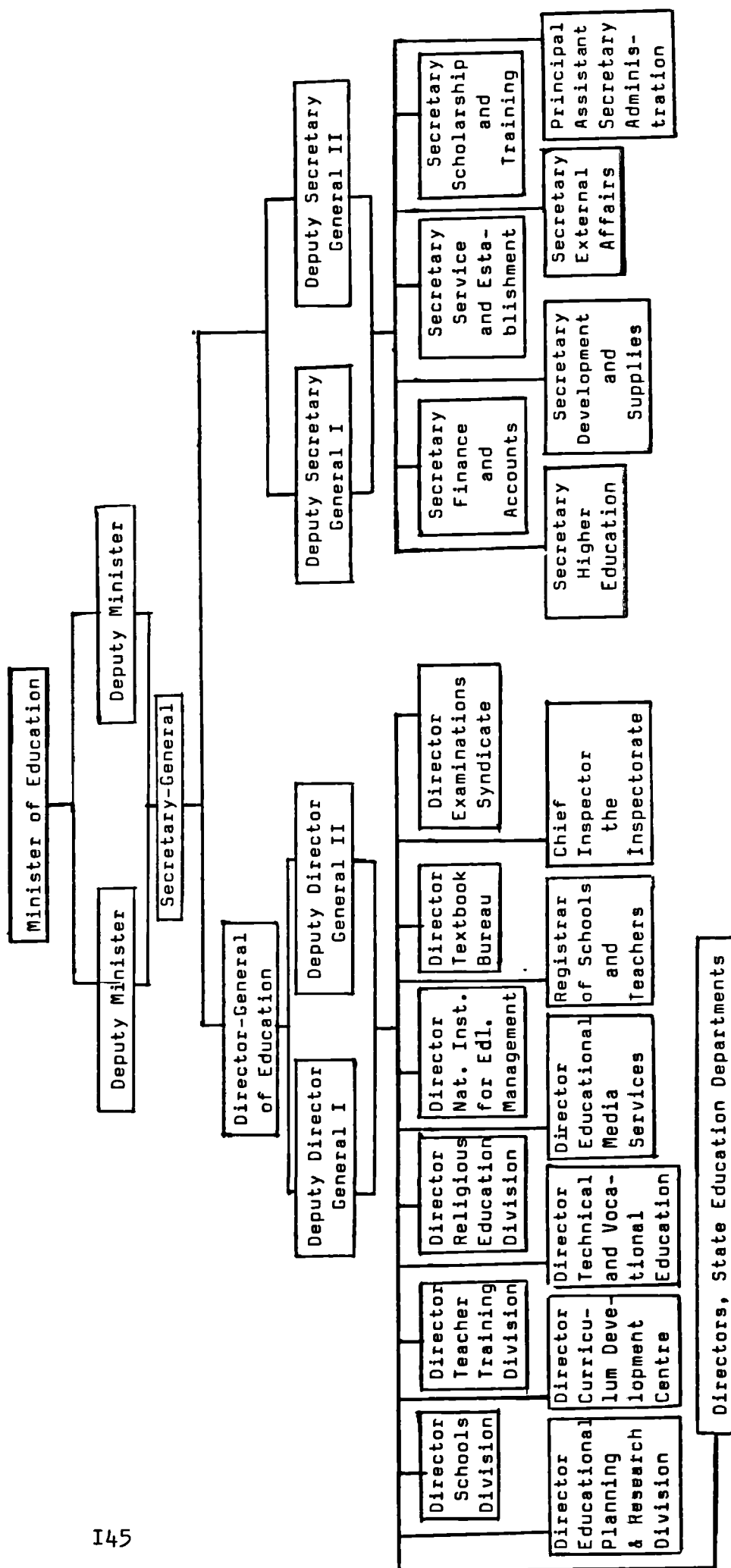
Ministry of Education is organized into nineteen divisions, each with its own functions. This organizational structure is shown in Figure 2.

The State level Each state has a State Education Department headed by the State Education Director, who is directly responsible to the Ministry of Education. Though seen as the nerve-centre of the machinery for all educational activities in the States, the education department is in effect 'a regional agency..... an arm of the Ministry of Education' (Wong and Ee, 1975, p. 124), and regularly receives and implements directives from the centre. The functions of the State Education Department are:

- (a) To implement the education policy on behalf of the Ministry of Education as provided for in the Education Act, 1961.
- (b) To implement education programmes in terms of managing, supervising and monitoring matters concerning curriculum, educational radio and television programmes, textbook loan scheme, libraries, co-curricular activities, career guidance and counselling, language programmes, health and nutrition education, the Schools Sports Council and matters related to establishment, finance and development.
(Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1979, pp. 139-140)

As at the national level, administration at the state level is also organized hierarchically, with officials designated as Director, Deputy Director, Supervisor, Coordinator, and so on. The organizational structure at the state level is shown in Figures 3.

Fig. 2: ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE, MINISTRY OF EDUCATION



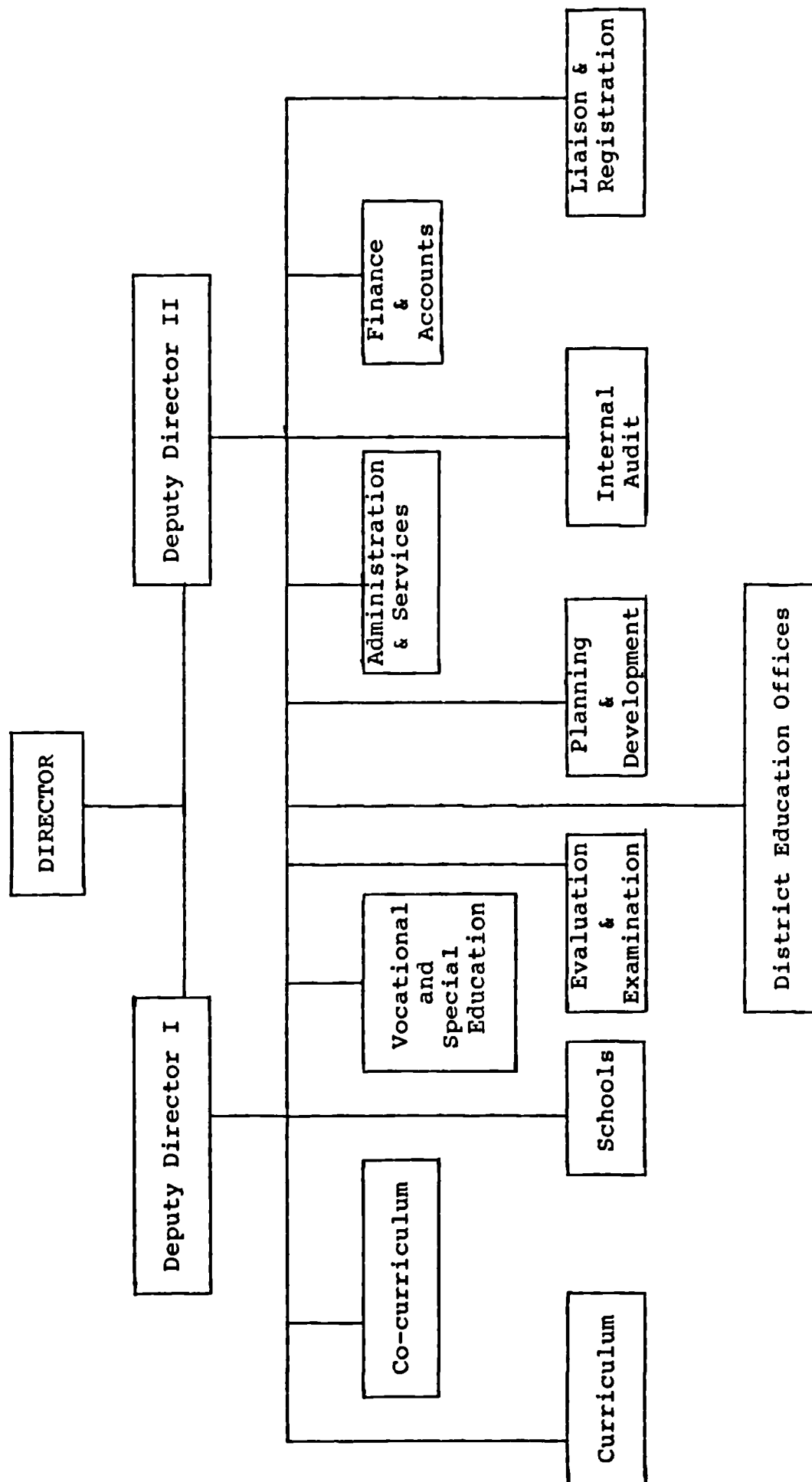
Source: Ministry of Education, Educational Planning and Research Division, 1981.

The District/Division level. The term 'division' is used in the east Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak where, due to their geographically large size, it had all along been necessary to have Division Education Officers to facilitate administration at the local levels. In Peninsular Malaysia, District Education Offices were set up in 1982 also to facilitate administration - as the volume of work at the state level has increased and become more complex, there is obviously a need to provide an intermediary between the state level and the numerous schools found throughout each state, some of which are in remote areas and not easily accessible. Thus, though the establishment of district education offices has been criticised by some as further bureaucratization of the education service, the Ministry of Education deems it to be a measure towards improving the quality of education in the country. The organizational structure at the district level is shown in Figure 4.

The School Level. The headteacher, assisted by a senior assistant or a supervisor, is responsible for all aspects of administration at the school level. His/her duties are stated as:

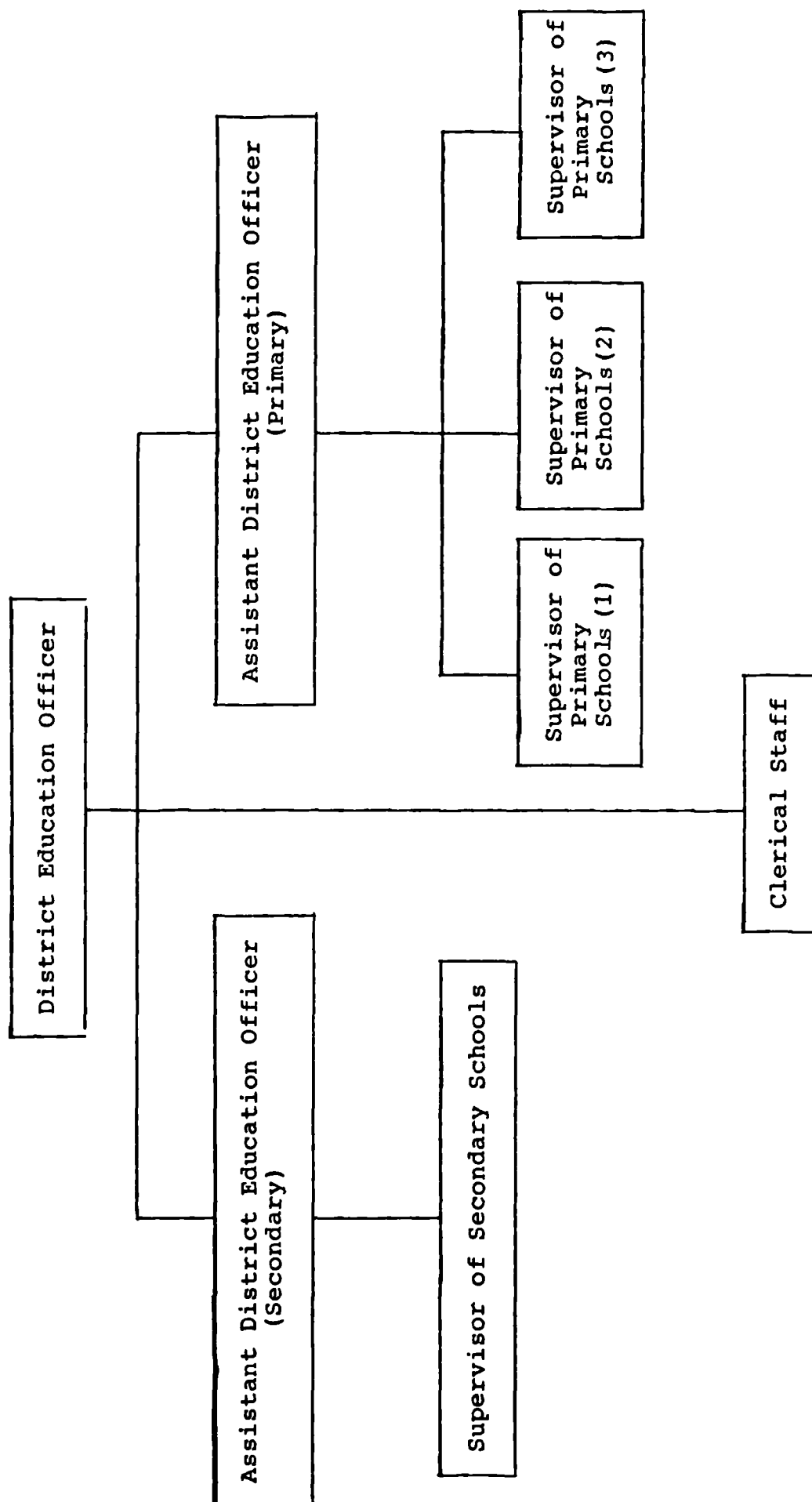
- (a) To implement all educational programmes stipulated by the Ministry of Education;
- (b) To supervise and guide the teachers in the school to ensure the quality of teaching and learning;

Fig.3: ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE, STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT



Source: Ministry of Education, Educational Planning and Research Division, 1981

Fig.4: ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE, DISTRICT EDUCATION OFFICE



Source: District Education Office, Petaling Jaya, 1986.

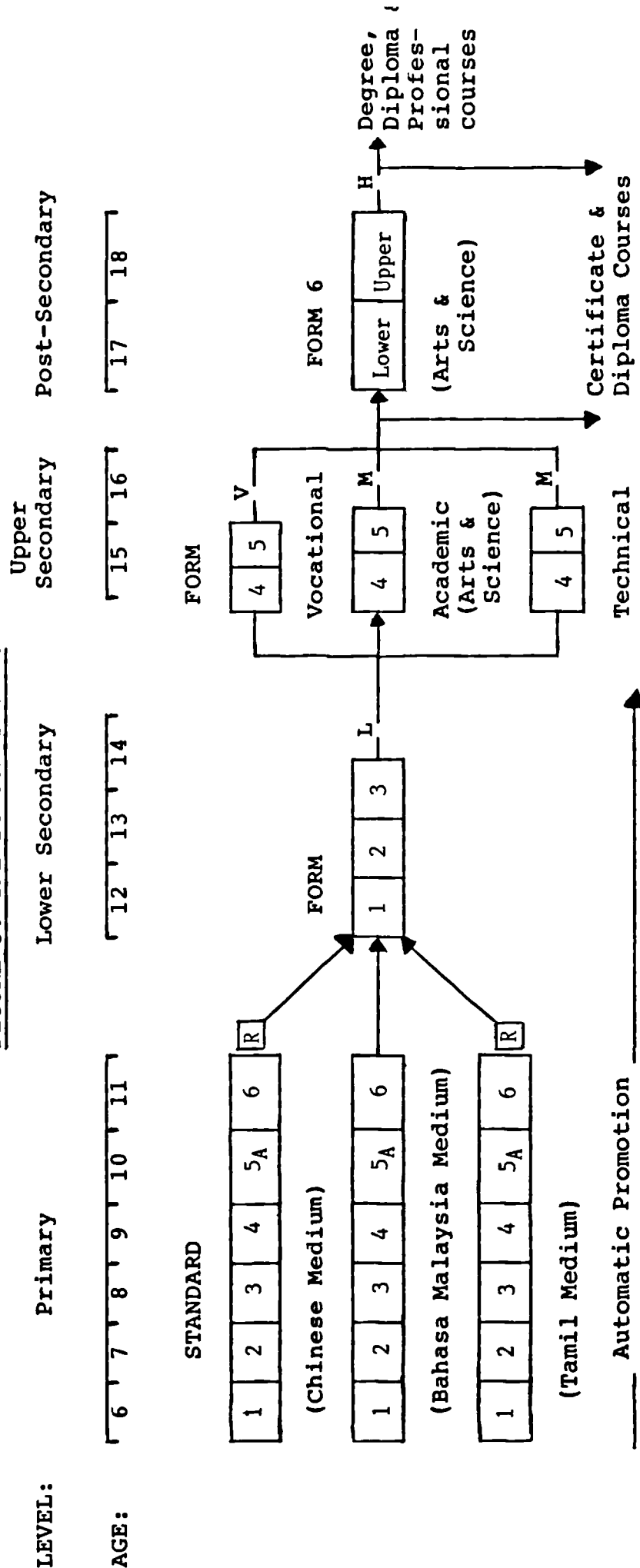
- (c) To monitor and supervise the pupils with regard to their education and matters such as discipline, sports activities, societies, welfare work and the like;
- (d) To establish good and effective relations with parents and the public through the Parent-Teacher Association and the Board of Governors/Managers.
(Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1979a, p.142)

The Cabinet Committee Report (1979) notes that 'the standard of administration and management in some schools leaves much to be desired' and attributes this to the fact that the headteachers 'lack training in administration. Thus they carry out their administrative duties using their own discretion and intuition'. Furthermore, the Committee finds that 'some headteachers do not follow new developments in educational management' (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1979a, p. 142). To me it is significant that the Report seems to give a great deal of emphasis on the managerial role of the headteacher and much less on his role as a professional or instructional leader. I would argue that in the implementation of KBSR, there can be no efficient 'management' so long as the headteacher does not appreciate his professional role. This is substantiated by the empirical data, to be discussed later.

The school system is organized in four stages. At the lowest level is primary education, which takes six years, and children progress from standard I to standard VI in the primary schools. The language of instruction in primary

schools is either Bahasa Malaysia or Chinese or Tamil. At the end of the fifth year of primary schooling all the children take a standardised Assessment Examination. This practice, however, is discontinued with the introduction of KBSR. From the primary level children move on to the lower secondary. This consists of three years of schooling, at the end of which they take the standarized Lower Certificate of Education (LCE) examination. Those who pass this examination may move on to the upper secondary stage which provides either academic (arts or science), technical or vocational education. Pupils are streamed or tracked into one of these based on their performance in the LCE examination. The upper secondary stage is for two years, culminating in the Malaysian Certificate of Education (MCE) or Malaysian Certificate of Vocational Education (MCVE) examination, as the case may be. Though the next stage, two years of Form Six (Lower and Upper), is a continuation of the upper secondary level and such classes are located in large secondary schools, the reality is that only about 10 percent of the pupils who take the MCE examination get selected into this post-secondary stage which provides pre-university education. Figure 5 illustrates this organization of the school system in Malaysia. It should be noted that while nine years of schooling is guaranteed for all children - though it is not made compulsory - the system becomes more selective thereafter. In 1983, for instance,

FIGURE 5: THE SCHOOL SYSTEM



Public Examinations:

- A: Standard 5 Assessment (discontinued in 1987)
- L: Lower Certificate of Education (LCE)
- V: Malaysian Vocational Certificate of Education (MVCE)
- M: Malaysian Certificate of Education (MCE)
- H: Malaysian Higher Certificate of Education (MHSC)
- [R]: Remove Classes: These are transitional classes of one year's duration provided to give intensive language lessons to pupils who have to change their medium of learning from Chinese or Tamil at the primary level to Bahasa Malaysia at the secondary level. An extra year has to be added to the ages of pupils who proceed from the Remove Classes.

Source: MINISTRY OF EDUCATION. Educational Planning and Research Division (1981) Education in Malaysia 1980. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

the rate of transition from the lower to the upper secondary stage was 74.8 percent (Ministry of Education, 1984).

The primary schools into which KBSR has been introduced are classified into three types:

- (a) National Schools, in which the medium of instruction has always been Bahasa Malaysia;
- (b) National Primary Schools, which formerly used English as the medium of instruction but have changed to Bahasa Malaysia since 1975; and
- (c) National Type Primary Schools, which use either Chinese or Tamil as the medium of instruction.

Primary education in Chinese or Tamil is in fact a perpetuation of the practice during colonial days. Since such schools are normally confined to the respective Chinese and Tamil communities, in the interest of nation-building time and again the government has been urged to convert these schools into National Primary Schools by replacing Chinese and Tamil with Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instruction. Noting that the primary age of six to twelve years represents the most impressionable age in a child's life, many educationists are concerned over the continued segregation of large numbers of Chinese and Tamil children in such schools. It is a measure of the sensitivity with which the issue of Chinese and Tamil languages are discussed

that the Cabinet Committee Report (1979) notes: 'In view of the present situation it is recommended that the present school system at the primary level be maintained' (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia , 1979a, p.16).

Primary schools are further catergorised into Grade A, B or C depending mainly on their size (enrolment). Pupil enrolment varies from as high as over 1,500 pupils to less than fifty pupils in a school. A Grade A school is normally located in a densely-populated urban area and, unlike inner-city schools in Britain, they are characterised by better facilities and more qualified teachers when compared with Grade C schools in the rural areas. In almost all the large schools, the limited number of classrooms available has made it necessary to have double sessions, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, with different sets of teachers and pupils for each session. What is even worse, sometimes two schools (and therefore two headteachers) occupy the same premises, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon, with different sets of teachers and supporting stuff but sharing a number of facilities. In such circumstances, it cannot be denied that the administrative burden placed on the headteacher is unduly high. It is conceivable that this state of affairs reduces the headteacher to performing the role of an administrator or manager, as I indicated earlier, at the expense of his professional role.

The school, it is important to note, is at the lowest level of the hierarchical educational structure. While it is true that the headteacher sets the tone and the climate for progress in his school, in a system of centralized control of expenditure as well as curriculum the Malaysian headteacher is invariably restricted by demands, directives and circulars from the higher levels of the educational hierarchy. Even assuming that headteachers and their staff have the professionalism or the expertise to conduct teaching-learning researches and devise appropriate curricula - which is hardly the case at present - the top-down organizational system definitely favours a RDD model when change is to be introduced. In order to illustrate the range of matters determined by the centre, I list below a few circulars that have been issued by the Ministry of Education in the past and transmitted down to schools through the State Directors of Education:

(a) Implementation of Teaching All Subjects in Bahasa Malaysia in Standard I in National-Type Schools (English) from January 1970 - Circular No. 8/1969.

(b) Teachers' Clothings in School - Circular No. 13/1969.

(c) Comprehensive Education in Lower Secondary Schools - Circular No. 7/1970.

- (d) The New Language Syllabus for National Primary Schools and National-Type Primary Schools - Circular No. 9/1971.
- (e) Education (School Discipline) Regulations, 1959 - Circular No. 1/1972.
- (f) Guide for Teachers' Transfer - Circular No. 3/1975.
- (g) Discipline in School: School Rules for Pupils - Circular No. 9/195.
- (h) Teachers' Duties during School Vacation - Circular No. 5/1977.
- (i) Pupil's Cumulative Record Card - Circular No. 9/1978.
- (k) School Uniform - Circular No. 12/1978.

(Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1979b)

The above list provides a few examples of the directives and guidelines that headteachers regularly receive from the centre and indicates that there is little room left for the headteachers' own initiatives. Accustomed as they are to receiving directives, this practice could easily lead to less enterprising headteachers becoming very dependent on

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the higher levels of the educational hierarchy - as we shall see later in the empirical data.

5. TEACHER EDUCATION

In Malaysia trained teachers are emplaced in different categories according to their academic and professional qualifications, as follows:

Category D - teachers who are university graduates and normally teach in upper secondary and sixth-form classes.

Category T - those who specialise in the teaching of technical and trade subjects.

Category C - college-trained teachers teaching at the primary and lower-secondary levels, with an academic qualification of either the Malaysia Certificate of Education (obtained after eleven years of primary and secondary schooling) or the Higher School Certificate.

Category B - college-trained teachers who possess academic qualifications lower than the Malaysian Certificate of Education.

Category X - Christian missionary teachers, only a few in number.

For the purpose of studying KBSR in its actual context, it is relevant that I examine briefly the training of teachers

in categories B and C above, as these are the teachers directly involved in the implementation of KBSR. In 1983 when KBSR was introduced throughout the nation there were 81,664 teachers teaching in primary schools. Of these 90.9 percent were trained teachers and the rest were temporary and untrained teachers (Siti Hawa, 1986).

Category B teachers, those who possess academic qualifications lower than the Malaysian Certificate of Education (the equivalent of the O-level in England), include those who were trained in the Sultan Idris Training College and the Malay Women's Training College. These two institutions were established during the colonial period to train teachers for the Malay vernacular primary schools. Originally their intake were students from the Malay primary schools (five or six years of primary schooling) who, in addition, had undergone three years of 'Teachers' Preparatory Class' during which time these student-teachers taught part-time in school and attended training during the weekend. At these two colleges they were then given two years of full-time teacher-training courses (Wong and Ee, 1975). Some of the teachers trained under this scheme are still teaching now, though most of them have by now retired. Category B also includes teachers who were trained at the Day Training Centres set up in 1957, the year Malaya attained independence. The students in these Centres had the Lower Certificate of Education (obtained after three

years of secondary schooling) as their minimum qualification. They were given three years of training, of which two years were done on a full-time basis while the third year was spent on part-time teaching and weekend training. The curriculum for these trainee teachers had to be tailored to their educational level, and it was felt that more emphasis should be placed on practice rather than on theory. Thus in the 1975 curriculum 'the wider aims of education are discussed and an attempt is made to relate the curriculum of primary schools to these aims, but the main emphasis is on how to teach.....' (cited by Wong and Ee, 1975, p. 116). This practice of recruiting students with three years of secondary schooling to be trained to become teachers in primary schools was discontinued in 1968, when the entry qualification was raised to five years of secondary schooling; the Malaysian Certificate of Education has since then become the minimum qualification. However, many of the teachers currently implementing KBSR are the product of the Day Training Centres.

Category C teachers, those who possess the Malaysian Certificate of Education or, additionally, the Higher School Certificate in a few cases, have undergone various schemes of training. Generally they have attended two years of full-time training at a residential college, including the Malayan Teachers' College at Kirkby in Liverpool and the Malayan Teachers' College at Brinsford Lodge in

Wolverhampton in the 1950s and early 1960s, as well as other colleges in Malaysia. The exception was the Regional Training Centres (RTC) set up in 1965 as an emergency measure when there was a sudden rise in the demand for teachers due to the introduction of comprehensive education at the lower secondary level. The two-year course at these RTCs consisted of part-time teaching and week-end training during the school term and courses to be attended at the Training colleges during the vacation. This programme was discontinued in 1968 when more residential colleges had been built. A number of teachers in the C category who had been trained to teach upper primary (Standards 4-6) and lower secondary (Forms 1-3) classes were, in the earlier days, posted to secondary schools after completing their training. However, now that the universities have produced more teachers for the secondary schools, it has been found necessary to transfer some of these college-trained teachers to primary schools. It appears from the interview data, to be discussed later, that years of teaching in secondary schools has not helped them in any way to be competent to teach in primary schools, especially to face the task of teaching KBSR.

As I have outlined above, the teachers who are currently implementing KBSR generally have had five years of secondary schooling, and some even less than that. The professional training given to them, in most cases, was for about two

years. Time and again proposals were made to extend the period of teacher training but the Ministry of Education had not been able to respond favourably due to the shortage of funds as well as teachers. Finally, however, to improve the quality of teachers at the primary and lower secondary levels, and in line with the recommendation of the Cabinet Committee Report (1979), it was decided that beginning with the intake of trainees in 1981, the training period would be extended from two to three years. Despite having expanded the intake capacity at the training colleges, the extension of the training programme led to a reduction in the average annual output of trained teachers to 3,600 during the period 1981 - 1983 compared with 5,900 in 1980. There had been increased enrolment and the implementation of KBSR necessitates an increase in the class-teacher ratio from 1:1.2 to 1:1.5. As a result in 1983 with the number of primary teachers at about 75,600, the shortage was estimated to be about 9,200 (Government of Malaysia, 1984, pp. 352-353). To overcome this problem, the three-year programme was revised and beginning with the intake in 1986 the duration of the training period for primary and lower secondary teachers has been reduced to two years and six months approximately.

It can be seen, then, that Malaysian primary teachers are different from their counterparts in England who, by and large, are degree holders and have traditionally enjoyed

some degree of professional autonomy. In contrast, Malaysian primary teachers have a lower academic qualification, and it is doubtful whether their initial teacher-training has adequately equipped them for the task of implementing KBSR. A recent survey on 'Perception of Understanding of Aspects of KBSR' conducted by the Teacher Education Division reveals that 34.9 percent of teacher-trainees in their final (third) year of training in 1984 (n=588) 'do not understand fully' the philosophy of KBSR, while the percentage that 'do not understand fully' the concept of 'continuous evaluation' in KBSR was equally high - 37.6 percent (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1985). In this respect, it is disturbing to note that Philosophy of Education, which was allotted 50 hours of lectures as a component in the Education syllabus of the three-year training programme, has now been combined with Sociology of Education and together they are allocated only 38 hours in the present two-and-a-half year training programme (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1986). In addition, there are no in-service courses aimed at raising curricular knowledge and understanding among teachers generally. The normal practice has been to conduct short, in-service courses for teachers who are to implement new syllabuses or curricula, and such courses invariably focus on 'how to' rather than a deeper understanding of rationale and concepts. All these factors, I maintain, do not contribute

towards the professionalization of teachers which is so necessary for the successful implementation of a child-centred curriculum.

It is noteworthy that at a recent workshop on 'The Philosophy of Teacher Education in Malaysia', attended by educationists from the local universities and high-level officials from the Ministry of Education, the participants produced a statement on what they conceived to be the ideal Malaysian teacher, as follows:

Taking into consideration our social and cultural milieu in which national unity and social cohesiveness is of prime importance, we believe that the ideal Malaysian teachers is one who

- is noble in character;
- has deep moral and religious convictions;
- is human, yet progressive and scientific in outlook;
- upholds the aspirations of the nation;
- cherishes the national cultural heritage;
- has a positive attitude towards learning, the school and society; and, being endowed with these attributes
- promotes the all-round development of the child;
- is loyal to his profession; and
- ensures the preservation of a united, democratic progressive and disciplined society.

(Ministry of Education, 1982, p. 17)

To analyse the characteristics ascribed to the 'ideal' Malaysian teacher is beyond the scope of this study. Suffice it to say that there is a certain particularity with regard to teachers and teaching in Malaysia - as is also the case in schooling - a particularity borne out of the social and political realities of a state striving to unite its peoples. Seen within this context of a 'disciplined

society', 'upholding the aspirations of the nation', etc. producing professionally autonomous teachers seems to fade into the background; it becomes, in a sense, irrelevant.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter discusses the Malaysian context into which KBSR has been introduced. In order to understand the present educational policy and the national education system, it is necessary to look into the past, and so a brief historical background has been provided. I have pointed out that British economic interests in the Malaysian region led them to acquire initially the three important ports around Peninsular Malaysia, beginning in the second half of the eighteenth century. Then the British steadily extended its administration to the mainland, usually by capitalizing on the situation that arose in the Malay states for the Malay Sultanates were then in a period of decline. By the early twentieth century British dominion over the region was complete. During the colonial period, in order to exploit fully the natural resources of the country, namely tin and rubber, the British administration imported labourers from India and China by the thousands and without due regard to the wishes of the indigenous population. This resulted in the creation of a plural society consisting of three separate communities: the indigenous Malays, the Chinese and the Indians, each community with its own culture and

religion. There was no question of assimilation; only the Malays regarded the country as their homeland while the political sentiments of the immigrant communities were in the direction of their countries of origin. The existence of a divisive society was no doubt advantageous to the British in prolonging their domination over Malaya. Thus, though Malay nationalism began to be visible in the early 1920s, it was not until 1957 that independence was attained - after an intervening period during which time the British had surrendered power to the Japanese during the Second World War. The short period of Japanese occupation in Malaya, for only three years, had succeeded in whipping up greater anti-British sentiments, so that when the British regained control in the region it was met with greater resistance from the Malays, who by then had demanded for self-government. In view of the fact that neighbouring Asian countries such as India and Indonesia had been decolonized at about this time, the British had no alternative but to agree to granting independence in August 1957. To this I might add a note that less than a year earlier, the British government had suffered a humiliating withdrawal in the Suez crisis - Britain stood condemned in the eyes of the world. Perhaps this experience in some way contributed towards hastening the end of British imperialism in Malaya.

Next, I have traced the development of education from the colonial period to the present. There existed during the British period parallel systems of schooling, each system confined to one community, except for the English schools which were open to all. The Chinese vernacular schools were China-oriented, with teachers and textbooks imported from China; the Tamil vernacular schools provided nominal primary education for the children of Indian labourers in the estates; the Malay vernacular schools - the system established and maintained by the British administration as they had a 'moral obligation' to provide education for the children of the indigenous population - taught basic literacy and numeracy together with some occupational skills such as gardening and basket-weaving. Several documents written throughout the British rule provide evidence of the nature and purpose of the education provided to the Malays. In general, despite the seemingly benevolent attitude towards the indigenous population, Malay children were to be given education in their own language and confined to the primary level; they were to be taught to be 'regular, obedient and cleanly' so that they would become better farmers and fishermen than their fathers; they were to be taught 'the dignity of manual labour' and to accept their 'lot in life' without questioning. English schools - which proved to be the only route towards social mobility - by virtue of being established in the urban areas attracted mainly the children of the Chinese and Indian immigrants

while the Malays living in the rural areas were effectively denied access to them. Requests from a few Sultans that the Malays be given some English education went unheeded until 1905, when the British set up the Malay College, patterned on the English public school, exclusively for the children of the Malay nobility.

There have been several interpretations of the British educational policy towards the Malays. It is probably true that it was a policy designed to confine the indigenous population to the rural areas so that they could not become a threat to British political and economic interests. Some documents refer to the 'trouble' which the British had experienced in India which, they believed, was caused by 'over-education'. In the light of this experience, it was all the more important to deliberately teach the Malay children to be obedient and to accept their lot in life. When it became necessary to systematically train teachers for the Malay vernacular schools as the number of such schools multiplied, a training college was established - the Sultan Idris Training College. Here was to be found the only post-primary education offered to the Malays in their own language, and it was here that the seed of Malay nationalism first appeared in the 1920s. But this small group of nationalists hardly posed a threat at that particular time. Other Malay elites, the English-educated graduates from the premier Malay College, had been absorbed

into the British bureaucracy and were thus less likely to challenge the British rule. Still, as I have argued, there is evidence to suggest that a few government employees, whether British or Malay, were summarily removed from their posts when they were allegedly involved in activities that would advance the cause of the Malays.

A comparison may be drawn here between the social and political conditions in England and Malaya at about the same time, and the resultant forms of schooling. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there seemed to be a similarity between the objective of elementary education in England and the objective of vernacular education for the Malays, in that both sought to provide basic literacy and numeracy and to inculcate good habits, particularly to make children obedient. But the conditions that produced schooling as a regulatory device were dissimilar. Whereas in England the problems to be solved were 'crime and pauperism' among the working class (Walkerdine, 1984), in Malaya the need was to consolidate British authority and to avoid unrest among the indigenous population. But monitorialism and coercion did not actually command widespread support in England. During the period between the two World Wars when there was an increase in juvenile crime and also the threat of political extremism, individualism, natural development, understanding, etc. were offered as a solution to social problems, so that by the

1930s the child-centred pedagogy expressed by the Hadow reports was widely acclaimed. Such conditions, however, did not prevail in Malaya - it was too remote to be affected by the revolutions in Russia and Europe or by the militarism of Germany. Thus there was no necessity to change the education policy that had served British interests very well, in that the various communities were kept apart by their separate systems of schooling and thereby prevented from uniting against the colonial rule. As I indicated in the foregoing paragraph, any potential threat was efficiently dealt with. The policy of divide and rule seemed to have ensured the superiority of the 'imperial race', and the colonised were indeed powerless.

After achieving independence in 1957, the immediate task of the newly-elected government was to unite the multi-ethnic population. In this respect, education has always been viewed as a powerful force that can contribute towards national unity. The Razak Report on Education (1956) laid the foundations for a national education system and this was consolidated by the Rahman Talib Report (1960). The promulgation of a national ideology known as RUKUNEGARA after the communal clashes in 1969 further specified the role education was to play in the task of nation-building. Malaysia is now committed to a common system of schooling, with a common curriculum and a common language of instruction (except at the primary level). Within the

common curriculum, Islamic Religions Knowledge is a compulsory subject for all Muslim children while non-Muslims are taught Moral Education, with the objective of developing a disciplined society with high moral values. Likewise, emphasis has also been placed on co-curricular activities in school, the idea being that inter-mingling of the various ethnic groups during such activities will promote integration.

An examination of the centralised education system in Malaysia reveals that the administration and management of education is organized hierarchically at four levels: the central or ministry level, the state, the district and the school levels. Each level is also organized hierarchically. The point to note is that within such a system there seems to be very little room for innovativeness at the periphery, that the system actually favours some form of the RDD model if change is to be effected.

The section on teacher education examined the qualification and training of Category B and Category C teachers, those who are involved in implementing KBSR in the primary classrooms. Generally they have had five years of secondary schooling and two years of teacher training. It is doubtful whether these are adequate to prepare them for the task of teaching KBSR. In-service courses held for teachers when a new curriculum or syllabus was introduced

tended to focus on the practical aspects of implementation - the 'how to' rather than a deeper understanding of the philosophy and rationale of a curriculum, much less on efforts to stimulate critical and reflective thinking among teachers. If KBSR demands professionalism and autonomy from the teachers, as I maintain it does, then the Malaysian primary teachers have a long way to go.

To conclude, it is obvious that Malaysia has been, at all time, concerned with ^{the} need to unite its peoples. Discussion of educational issues, therefore, cannot be divorced from this context. Thus this chapter has provided the background against which KBSR will be examined later.

CHAPTER V

CURRICULAR ISSUES

The wider national context for education has been discussed in the previous chapter. I have emphasized that the overriding concern of Malaysia is to achieve national integration and unity, and that education is seen as an important apparatus towards achieving that end. This chapter narrows down the discussion to more specific issues concerning curriculum development in Malaysia. First I shall look at the infrastructure for curriculum development, noting the transition from ad hoc syllabus committees to the emergence of the national Curriculum Development Centre. This is followed by an examination of some past primary curriculum projects which, in one way or another, have some bearing on the issues I raise concerning KBSR. Finally I shall look briefly at conditions in the primary school that brought about pressures for change in the primary curriculum.

1. THE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Malaysian curriculum development, in its very elementary form, can be traced back to 1956 when, approximately a year before independence, the Razak Report pronounced:

We cannot overemphasize our conviction that the introduction of syllabuses common to all schools in the

Federation [of Malaya] is the crucial requirement of educational policy in Malaya. It is an essential element in the development of a united Malayan nation. It is the key which will unlock the gates hitherto standing locked and barred against the establishment of an educational system acceptable to the people of Malaya as a whole. Once all schools are working to a common instruction, we consider the country will have taken the most important steps towards establishing a national system of education which will satisfy the needs of the people and promote their cultural, social, economic and political development as a nation.

(Razak Report, 1956, para 119)

The recommendation of the above Report to introduce common syllabuses to all schools led to the formation of a General Syllabuses and Time-table Committee, whose task was to formulate the common content syllabuses, including specifying the time to be allocated to each individual subject at the various levels of schooling. Curriculum development was conceived merely as the determination of subjects to be taught in schools and the selection of content for each subject; but because of the political significance of education at the time, the Committee was headed by a politician, while its members included politicians as well as educationists and teachers (Chew, 1979, p. 134). It can be said, then, that Malaysian education has been politicised right from the dawn of independence. The Committee delegated the responsibility of preparing the various syllabuses and courses of studies to sub-committees composed of educationists and teachers, whose submissions were later assessed by the Committee and subsequently given approval for implementation in schools.

Through this approach of curriculum construction, by the end of 1957 ten syllabuses had been published.

The introduction of comprehensive education in 1965 necessitated the formation of a General Syllabus Review Committee, later replaced by the Central Curriculum Committee. Again the curriculum development strategy employed was to establish ad hoc subject committees whose task was to revise old syllabuses or devise new ones as the case may be. However, the draft syllabus produced by each subject committee was circulated to selected teachers for their comments and, where necessary, subsequently modified. The syllabus was then tried out in some schools, and feedback received from the 'trial' may be incorporated in the finalized syllabus, which was then gazetted as the official syllabus for all schools to adopt. This subject-based approach was the *modus operandi* in Malaysia curriculum construction and renewal for more than a decade. In fact even today curriculum renewal is still largely dominated by the syllabus revision approach, the only difference being the existence of the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) which now provides full-time personnel (unlike the part-time ad hoc committees in the past) to deal with the details of material development and preparation for implementation. As Chew observes, 'The operating assumption appears to be that new educational concerns and problems would be resolved once a new syllabus, embodying a set of beliefs, a reconsidered

organization of subject matter and a revised approach to teaching has been developed' (Chew, 1979, pp. 135-136).

The revision of the History syllabus for Malaysian schools in the 1970s is a case in point; and incidentally, it also illustrates the preponderance given to national aspirations. The History syllabus was revised mainly as a consequence of the recommendations of the Congress on Malaysian Culture, held in 1971, and the subsequent Malaysian History Seminars organized by the Historical Society of the National University in 1973 and 1974. It was recommended that the History syllabus 'should emphasize more the endeavours of Malaysians and reflect the views of Malaysian historians rather than the perceptions of foreign historians' (Ibid, p. 136). The resultant revised history syllabus for Primary and Lower Secondary Schools undeniably echoes this view when it states:

In organizing the aims and content of the History syllabus of a nation, it is necessary to ensure that it is consistent with the policy and constitution and the educational objectives of the nation so that it assists the national effort to achieve its aims. In selecting the content of History, it must be consistent with the national aspiration stated in RUKUNEGARA [the National Ideology] and the aim of teaching History itself.
(Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1977, pp. 2-3)

The Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), the agency which is now responsible for developing school curricula, did not come into existence until 1973, though the need to raise the quality of education through curriculum improvement had

already been recognized in the First Malaysia Plan (1966-1970). The establishment of the Central Curriculum Committee in the late 1960s, with the Educational Planning and Research Division (EPRD) of the Ministry as its secretariat, was an attempt to institutionalize curriculum development. The secretariat 'consisted of one intermittent full-time staff (increased to two in 1971) and a foreign consultant under the Ford Foundation' (Yeoh et al., 1977, p. 7). At about the same time the Schools Division of the Ministry had a functional unit involved in activities to improve the teaching of Science and Mathematics at the primary level - the semblance of a Science Centre began to emerge, in an informal way. In 1970/71, with the assistance of a foreign UNESCO consultant attached to EPRD and the Schools Division, a proposal for formalizing this centre was submitted to the World Bank for funding. This resulted in the establishment of the Education Development Centre in 1971. A year later financial assistance was sought from the United Nations Development Programme; as a result in 1973 the Centre was consolidated and further expanded to form the CDC, the agency now in existence.

The CDC's main aim is 'to improve the quality of education in Malaysian schools, bearing in mind the national goals as reflected in the First and Second Malaysia Plans' (Asiah, 1980, p. 59). With the establishment of the CDC, the original conception of curriculum as merely syllabuses

for subjects to be taught has been broadened. A 1974 position paper states that the CDC views curriculum as 'not only what pupils learn, but how they learn it, and how teachers help them learn, using what supporting materials, styles and methods of assessment, and in what kind of facilities' (Ministry of Education, 1974, p. 1). A more comprehensive definition has been provided by the Cabinet Committee Report (1979); though this definition of the curriculum appears to be more in line with the generally acceptable understanding of the curriculum, yet it is delimited by the imposition of 'the Malaysian context'. This definition is as follows:

A curriculum is an educational programme encompassing all the knowledge and skills, values and norms, elements from the culture and beliefs which have been selected by society to be transmitted to its members. The role of the curriculum in education is to develop the child as a whole, physically, spiritually, mentally and emotionally, as well as to cultivate, instill and foster desirable moral values, besides imparting knowledge. In the Malaysian context, the curriculum also has a role to play in creating citizens who uphold the national aspiration for unity in accordance with RUKUNEGARA, in addition to producing trained manpower for the needs of the nation.
(Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1979a, p.66)

The functions of the CDC, as stated in its Annual Report of 1982 and elsewhere, are as follows:

To identify and translate national needs and aspirations into curriculum specifications.

To plan and develop curriculum programmes for continuous, systematic and qualitative development in education.

To develop and produce curriculum materials such as syllabuses of instruction, teacher guidelines, pupil learning materials, evaluation instruments, audio-visual aids and prototype teaching and learning equipment.

To disseminate information on curriculum innovations and practices to teachers in schools and others in the community.

To organize pilot in-service teacher education courses in order to communicate innovations, changes and revisions to those concerned.

To conduct surveys and analyses of significant worldwide trends and developments in curriculum specifications and teaching practices.

Perhaps it is useful to note here that from the time of its inception till 1977, the CDC had received the services of six consultants. Their areas of specialization were: Psychology, Evaluation, Population Education, Language and Primary School Integrated Curriculum (Yeoh et al., 1977). No doubt it was necessary to engage foreign consultants initially but at the same time the CDC embarked on a programme of professional development for its officers, which continues till today. Its staff attend courses, workshops, regional and international seminars and symposiums and they are also sent for study visits abroad.

In 1982, for instance, twelve officers of the CDC were taking courses at Masters level - nine in the United States, one in Britain, one in India and one in Japan (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1982b).

Administratively the CDC, like other divisions of the Ministry of Education, is organized hierarchically, with the Director of Curriculum at its highest level. This organizational structure is shown in Fig. 6. The CDC has to work closely with other divisions of the Ministry - especially the Teacher Education Division, the Examinations Syndicate, the Inspectorate and the Textbook Bureau - and the state Departments of Education. The final authority on curriculum matters lies with the Central Curriculum Committee which is chaired by the Director-General of Education, but in matters where there are wider policy implications or significant financial involvement approval is required from the Educational Planning Committee chaired by the Minister of Education.

In its efforts at curriculum development and renewal, the Director of the CDC states that 'the approach taken by the CDC is essentially the centre-periphery approach. The central and national nature of the CDC, and the common curriculum, call for this approach' (Asiah, 1980, p. 61). This supports the arguments I put forward at various points earlier - that the centralization of education in Malaysia,

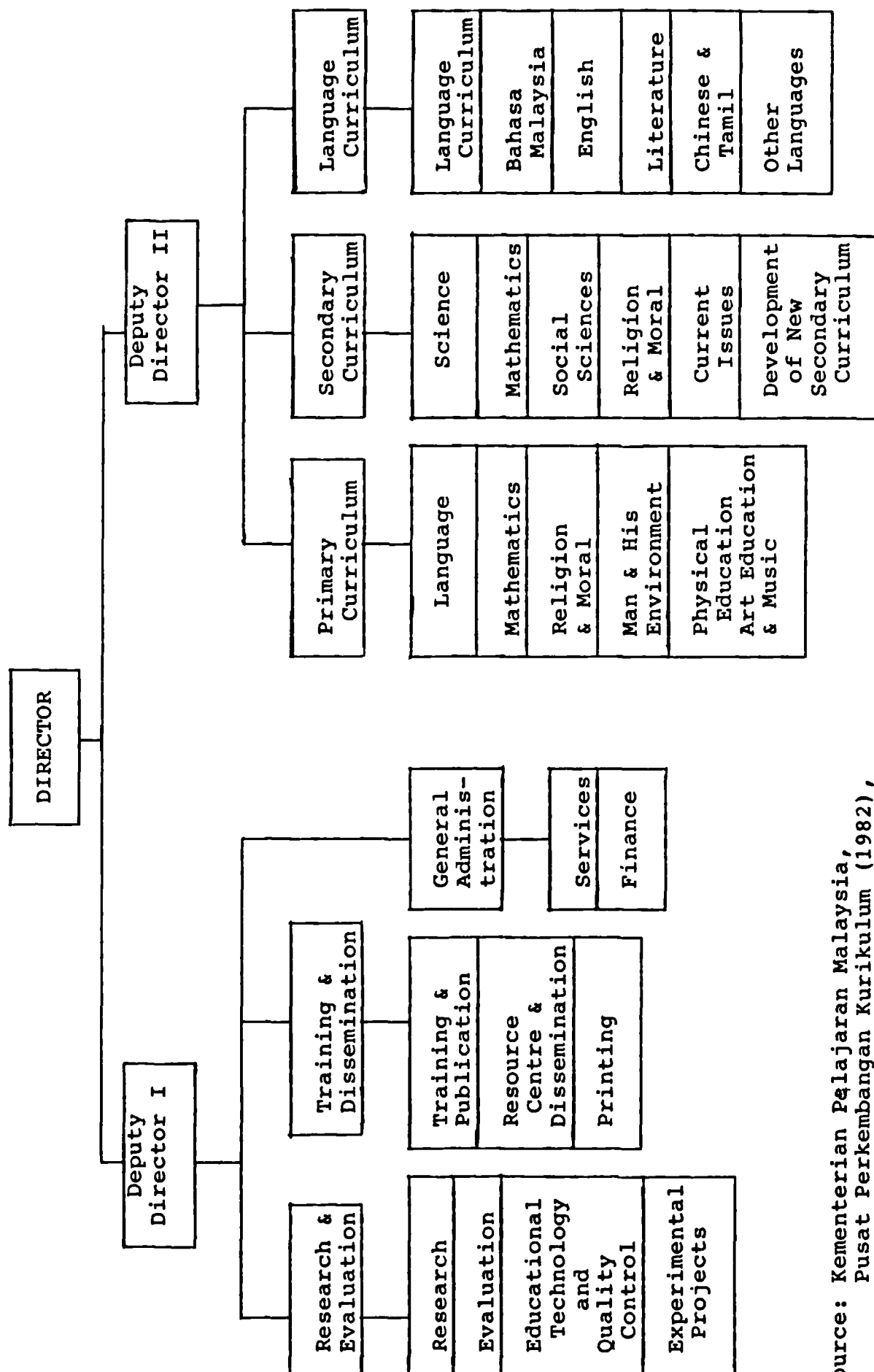
its hierarchical administrative structure and the peculiar socio-political context (in addition to lack of teacher professionalism) predicate the RDD or centre-periphery model as the only alternative for curriculum development or change. The Director acknowledges that 'wider participation in all stages of the curriculum development process is necessary.....' and indeed '..... A number of strategies have been tried in order to achieve this aim' (Ibid, p. 70), yet

..... it is anticipated that the adoption of a totally school-based curriculum development strategy is not likely, nor is it desirable. A certain degree of centralization is necessary to ensure that the desired common elements prevail in the curriculum of all schools in the country and that the provision of equality of opportunity can be enforced, but equally important is the maximum utilization of the limited resources of the country.

(Asiah, 1980, p. 70)

Consistent with its centre-periphery approach, the CDC 'adopts and adapts' the objectives model in designing its curricula. As rationalised by its Director, 'Specifying clearly the objectives of a curriculum is a way of ensuring that pupils learn and develop in a manner best suited for them, (and the nation)' (Ibid, p. 60). While such a rationale is often disputed (see, for example, Kliebard, 1968; Stenhouse, 1975; Hamilton 1976), it is not necessary that the controversies regarding the objectives model be discussed here.

Fig.6: ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT CENTRE



Source: Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia,
 Pusat Perkembangan Kurikulum (1982),
 Laporan Tahunan 1982 [Annual Report 1982].

2. PAST CURRICULUM PROJECTS

Over the years the CDC - and, before its inception the Schools Division and the Educational Planning and Research Division of the Ministry - has been involved in several curriculum projects aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning in primary and secondary schools. Some of these projects, notably those undertaken in the earlier years, were adopted and adapted. Examples of these were the Integrated Science for Forms I-III, the Modern General Science for Forms IV and V and the secondary Modern Mathematics, which were based on the Scottish Integrated Science, the Nuffield Secondary Science and the Scottish Mathematics Group respectively. Other projects were more indigenous, though in the 1970s more often than not a foreign consultant would be attached to a new project. Here I will examine in some detail three projects, projects which I believe have some bearing on the issues I raise concerning KBSR, whether directly or indirectly.

Special Project for the Improvement of Science and Mathematics Teaching in Primary Schools (Projek Khas)

In 1968 a Report by the Federal Inspectorate of Schools on 'Primary Education in the National Schools of West Malaysia' recommended, among other things, that priority be given to improving the teaching of Science and Mathematics in

National Primary Schools, particularly those in rural areas. As a result, the Schools Division embarked on the Projek Khas (Special Project), funded by Asia Foundation during its first year. A United States consultant (the Director of the US Peace Corps in Malaysia at the time) was unofficially identified for the Project. Subsequently UNESCO undertook arrangements for the consultancy.

The project aimed at providing some services and facilities to primary teachers with a view to improving their competence in teaching Science and Mathematics. Its specific objectives were:

To prepare teacher guidesheets based on the existing syllabuses.

To implement these in the shortest possible time through trained key-personnel at the selected State centre of excellence.

To set up a network of communication systems through in-service exposure courses, field visits and newsletters.
(Yeoh et al., 1977, p. 23)

The preparation of **Panduan Mengajar** (teachers' guide), written in Bahasa Malaysia, began in 1969. There was an urgent need 'to get the guides out to the schools as early as possible' (Yeoh et al., 1977, p. 25) in order to assist primary teachers in the teaching of Science and Mathematics. As a result, the guidesheets began to be distributed to schools in 1970 without prior trial or revision. These guidesheets were based on the existing syllabuses for

Science and Mathematics and written with the understanding that the primary teachers concerned had very little knowledge of science and had never been trained to teach it. Thus both subject content and approach were supposed to be dealt with by the Panduan. Further, it was assumed that the inquiry approach was the best or most effective method for teaching Science: 'The learning activities are supposed to be explored or conducted by the pupils with the guidance of the teacher. The teacher guides the pupils to find answers from their own experiences and to learn how and what to do with the instructional materials' (Ibid, pp. 25-26). Teachers were exposed to the Project through week-end courses or an intensive six-day period of in-service training, conducted by key personnel. From 1970 to 1974, a total of 28,539 teachers had been exposed to the Project. Besides the in-service training, there was a mobile van equipped with a laboratory and materials to bring services and facilities to remote schools, and there were also newsletters for the communication and diffusion of ideas and views among teachers.

The relevant question to be asked is whether the Project had succeeded in raising the standard of Science and Mathematics teaching - and by implication, learning - in Malaysian primary schools. Clearly the design of the Project itself did not include any systematic evaluation. But the CDC did carry out an evaluation of the Project in

1975. Its findings on teacher perception of the Project, which were reported very briefly, revealed that 10 percent of the teachers surveyed (n=2,520) did not use the Panduan at all while some had used it only partially (Ibid, p. 28). Unfortunately, there was no detailed compilation of the reason for teacher acceptance or rejection. The CDC did, however, acknowledge that one of the shortcomings of the Project was that 'the time element is not sufficiently recognized as a crucial problem' and that 'curriculum development would not be effective unless it is developed and tried out under actual classroom conditions.....' (Ibid, p. 29).

Yeoh et al. (1977), in their review of the Projek Khas as part of an overall study of the CDC, have expressed their concern over the overwhelmingly top-down nature of the Project:

..... in all of the teacher in-service workshops, teachers were directed to attend and receive re-trainingcharacteristically, all of the curricular work and teacher re-training were not only Ministry-directed but Ministry-centred as well Over time, it was not surprising that teachers' expectations should increase and they come to depend more upon the prescriptive teacher's guides The long-term effect of having provided such centrally directed and administered programme for the primary school teachers was that they in turn reacted with increasing detachment, resulting in the polarization between practice on the one hand and decision-making on the other.
(Yeoh et al., 1977, p. 88)

An earlier evaluation of Science and Mathematics Education covering primary as well as secondary schools (Sim et al., 1973) had, in fact, come to a similar conclusion. It was pointed out that teachers and pupils had become passive recipients of directives, that teachers perceived their role merely as implementors of directives. With particular reference to Projek Khas, primary teachers had used the guidesheets as a 'crutch' rather than as a guide to improve their understanding and teaching of science. The concepts of 'inquiry' or 'discovery' were never meaningful to teachers and they tended to associate discovery learning with physical activity.

The above observations and findings seem to support the points I raised earlier regarding centralized control, lack of teacher autonomy and unquestioning acceptance of directives from above. No doubt these are observations and findings related to earlier curriculum projects, the Projek Khas being the pioneer in the Ministry's efforts at curriculum improvement, but I should not preclude the possibility of similar characteristics surfacing in the current implementation of KBSR. However, this is a matter which will be discussed further when I examine my empirical data later.

Multi-Media Self-Instruction Teacher Education Project

This project can be considered as an appendage to the **Projek Khas** discussed above. Feedback concerning the performance of teachers in the **Projek Khas** had caused some concern - it was obvious that their standard of teaching could not be sufficiently improved merely through exposure courses and the provision of teacher guidesheets. This, it was felt, was because the teachers generally had inadequate initial education, some of them possessing academic qualifications of Standard VI (six years of schooling) only. Such teachers needed assistance not only in teaching Science and Mathematics but also in understanding the scientific and mathematical concepts to be taught. Arising from this need, it was decided that another strategy be devised to supplement the in-service training programmes. Teachers were to be given self-instructional materials 'which are designed to help them to instruct themselves towards some mastery of the basic Science and Mathematics concepts....' (Yeoh et al., 1977, p. 51). UNICEF agreed to provide the funding and work on this project began in 1974. Its objectives were stated as:

- To develop instructional materials for the upgrading of selected substantive content in Science and Mathematics and pedagogic skills of primary teachers that
 - a) can be used by individual teachers, on their own, with minimal initial introduction;

- b) will supplement the present in-service training;
 - c) will reduce the need for extensive in-service training,
 - d) could be produced at a reasonable cost.
- To field-try the materials on a pilot basis to determine the most efficient method of their introduction to teachers, and
 - To make recommendations concerning further development and implementation of such materials, based on an evaluation of the initial trials.
- (Yeoh et al., 1977, pp. 51-52)

A preliminary survey was conducted to identify topics of high priority in terms of the teachers' needs. This was followed by another survey to determine the content and instructional skills urgently needed by teachers. In 1975 the project team, consisting of one CDC officer and two other members, began to develop modules which included programmed text, supplementary readers, cassette tapes and a teaching manual to provide supplementary reading on 'how to teach'. The plan was to develop a complete, self-instructional multi-media kit for each topic, consisting of booklets, tapes, film strips, apparatuses and other materials so as to enable teachers to increase their knowledge and understanding of these topics and thence to teach them. Yeoh et al., (1977) have identified the problems of this project as: too many activities to be undertaken in view of the skeletal number of staff, lack of general and clerical support facilities, and lack of expertise in the preparation of self-instructional

materials, while Siti Hawa notes that 'dissemination was hampered by costs and further development ceased' (Siti Hawa, 1986,p.97). ^{Clearly the development} of multi-media kits would be a financial strain - despite initial foreign or international funding - surely a luxury which a Third World country could ill-afford; to that extent, it can be said that the project was ill-conceived. More than that, though, I would contend that it possessed the very defect highlighted earlier in relation to Projek Khas, namely the top-down paternalistic approach. The only difference was that there seemed to be a more kindly approach in this case, teachers were not obliged to comply with the directives. But this leads me to raise another concern: underlying this 'remedial' project, as I think it could be called, was the assumption that teachers would have the willingness or the motivation to improve themselves and their teaching. Used as they were to the customary form of 'coercion' (directives), this was most unlikely with regard to Malaysian primary teachers generally except, perhaps, if there were a concomitant reward system for improved teacher performance.

In reviewing this project, the point I seek to draw is that it underscored the inadequacies of the Malaysian primary teachers who were expected to improve the quality of Science and Mathematics teaching. To some extent this confirms the proposition I made earlier concerning lack of teacher professionalism generally. It remains to be seen

whether KBSR will display similar characteristics.

The Integrated Curriculum Project

This was a project in which the present researcher was personally involved (albeit only for a few days) when, as a lecturer in a teacher training college, she was invited to attend an in-service course for project staff and cooperating teachers in 1975. When details concerning KBSR began to be available in the early 1980s, mainly through the press and seminars organized by professional organizations, the researcher sensed that to some extent KBSR had, in fact, been preceded by the Integrated Curriculum Project. It is useful, therefore, to examine this project - probably the precursor to KBSR - in some detail.

This project was launched by the Ministry of Education in June 1974 with the aim of improving the quality of education in the first three years of primary schooling. The problem to be redressed was the 'bookish' nature of learning in primary schools. The curriculum was subject-based and consisted of syllabuses for teachers to cover. The emphasis was on rote learning, on the accumulation of information rather than understanding. Learning had come to mean reading and writing from textbooks and teachers stuck closely to the syllabuses and texts. It was recognized that compartmentalised teaching and learning was not meaningful

to children. The solution, therefore, was to introduce an integrated curriculum which would cut across subject boundaries and 'enable the child to acquire knowledge, understanding, skills, values and attitudes so that he may perceive relationship more easily than if he were made to master isolated skills on particular components of knowledge....' (Ahmad, 1983, p.186). Since the problem of 'book-learning' was prevalent throughout the primary school years, and indeed in secondary schools as well, it is not clear why the project was confined to only the first three years of primary schooling. Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that the project was experimental in nature. In any case, when the project was first designed its objectives were stated as:

- a) to design and develop an integrated primary curriculum for Grades One to Three, based on the need to inter-relate and integrate the educational experiences of children during the first three years of schooling;
- b) to experiment with, evaluate and recommend improved teaching methods which are child-centred and activity-oriented;
- c) to develop teachers' guides and related pupils' materials; and
- d) to develop strategies for implementing the improved teaching content, methods and materials in schools.
(Ahmad, 1983, pp. 186-187; emphasis mine)

Funding for the project was obtained from UNICEF, which noted that the project was concerned 'with the physical, intellectual and emotional development of young children' and 'aimed to solve a problem, was innovative and was likely

to have multiplier effects' (Adams and Chen, 1981, p. 152). Unlike previous curriculum intervention projects, an important qualification was made: the project was not to be implemented immediately on a nation-wide scale; a committee consisting of representatives of the Ministry of Education, the Economic Planning Unit of the Prime Minister's Department and UNICEF stipulated that by 1980, when UNICEF funding would cease and Malaysia would assume full responsibility, the Ministry was to decide either to:

1. Take no further action if the project did not produce any results in curriculum programmes and teaching practices that were significantly better than the existing curriculum and teaching practices.

or

2. To implement the proved programmes, teaching practices and materials in all primary schools in the country.
(Adams and Chen, 1981, p. 152)

The project encountered several initial difficulties. A project unit entrusted with the responsibility of developing and evaluating the new Integrated Curriculum was set up at the CDC, but the staff had no previous experience and training in curriculum planning and development. After a delay of one year, a foreign consultant arrived from England. Though rich in teaching and supervisory experience, he was 'unfamiliar with the Malaysian scene and with the technicalities of curriculum development' (Ibid, p. 153). There was a further delay as the consultant 'wisely engaged himself in learning about the Malaysian situation'

(Ibid, p. 154). In the meantime, some of the project staff were able to take advantage of an AMEC (Anglo-Malaysian Educational Cooperation) study visit to Britain to observe classes that were using the integrated curriculum approach. Six pilot schools were then identified, and the first in-service course on Integrated Curriculum for the project staff and headteachers and cooperating teachers of the six pilot schools was held in August 1975. The two tutors for the in-service course were brought in from England and, as in the case of the consultant, hardly knew anything about Malaysia. The topics they dealt with were related to child development, teaching practices in British primary schools and the preparation of teaching aids. The theory and practice of curriculum development did not constitute part of the course, 'no doubt because of the tutors' greater familiarity with other things' (Adams and Chen, 1981, p. 154). Towards the end of 1975 the Integrated Curriculum was introduced in the six pilot schools, but by this time the English consultant had left and soon afterwards the project leader was transferred to another project, leaving only two experienced teachers in the project team to carry on. The result was that the whole project faltered and the new Integrated Curriculum was seen to progress only in one school. The success story in this school was attributed to the fact that the headmistress of the school had, in earlier years, attended a course on Montessori pre-school

education. It was because she was knowledgeable, full of enthusiasm, gave support to her staff and was able to help them as problems arose that the Integrated Curriculum proved to be successful in her school.

UNICEF's query about unexpanded funds led to a reorganization and stock-taking of the situation. An officer who had some specialised training in curriculum development was found to head the project. The task of the project was re-defined to focus more on actual patterns of behaviour in the teaching- learning process, as follows:

- a) to change children's classroom learning from passive learning, merely receiving instructions from the teacher all the time, to active involvement in the learning process;
- b) to change teaching from classroom instruction by the teacher to the whole class all the time, to teaching children individually or in small groups most of the time;
- c) to change teaching from the syllabus rigidly all the time to giving children some opportunity to decide what to learn;
- d) to develop better communication skills both in language and numerical expressions.
(Adams and Chen, 1981, p. 155; emphases mine)

In 1978 the Integrated Curriculum was introduced to twenty two selected schools designated as pilot schools while the six earlier pilot schools became known as laboratory schools, signifying perhaps that these were the schools in which most curriculum materials were first tried out and that these six schools were closely monitored by the

CDC. A ten-day orientation course was held for the headteachers of the twenty-two schools, along with some ^a organizers of schools from the State Department of Education. Subsequently the headteachers were given the responsibility of training the teachers in their own schools. The teaching materials developed by the project team with the cooperation of the teachers in the laboratory schools were intended to familiarize teachers with the principles underlying the Integrated Curriculum approach so that they would be able to internalize them and be able to create other curricular materials suitable for their own classrooms. In its earlier experimentation period, the project adopted a centres-of-interest approach, integrating all subjects within the primary curriculum. It was found that this resulted in the neglect of certain concepts and skills considered important in the mastery of the 3Rs. A thematic approach was then adopted, confining integration to only four subjects: Local Studies, Health Education, Science and Art and Craft.

Unlike the earlier projects, the Integrated Curriculum seemed to have been continuously evaluated. Its planning stage was evaluated 'by obtaining the relevant opinions and judgements of experts' (Ahmad, 1983, p. 195). Its implementation at the pilot stage was continuously evaluated to provide feedback to the project team. Teachers in the laboratory schools provided comments on the prototype instructional materials developed. The in-service courses

for headteachers and teachers in the laboratory schools were also evaluated. Despite the close supervision, support and cooperation given by the project staff to the laboratory school teachers, this project still featured one of the weaknesses apparent in earlier projects. It was found, according to the Director of the Educational Planning and Research Division, that

..... one of the barriers to ensuring effective implementation of the new curriculum was the lack of understanding among teachers regarding the curriculum, and its implications for the teaching-learning situation. The in-service training programme seems to have very little effect in removing this constraint.....

(Ahmad, 1983, p. 198)

The Director of the CDC, referring to new curriculum programmes generally, has attributed their lack of success to teacher attitude towards examinations:

..... more important than retraining is the attitude of the teacher towards his role and function of getting children to pass examinations. Such attitudes have arisen from the extraordinary importance given to examinations, where certificates are necessary in the scramble for modern sector jobs. Hence the non-examinable areas tend to be neglected, inculcation of values and attitudes tend to be considered less important, outdoor activities and practical work are often ignored and inquiry-discovery problem-solving methods considered impractical and a waste of time. Hence the lack of total success of new curriculum programmes which place so much emphasis on attitude formation, development of inquiring and critical minds and greater participation of pupils in the classroom.

(Asiah, 1980, p. 69)

At this juncture it is useful to summarise the

differences between the Integrated Curriculum Project and others before it. These are:

- (a) Implementation. The project was experimental in nature. The Ministry of Education was to decide in 1980 whether to reject it or to accept and implement it nation-wide.
- (b) Assumption. Underlying this project is the assumption that the quality of children's learning would be enhanced if learning was made more meaningful through the integration of subjects and made relevant through childrens' direct experience, employing activity-oriented and inquiry-based approaches.
- (c) Evaluation. Formative evaluation was carried out throughout the experimentation. Materials were tried out in the laboratory schools and modified where necessary.
- (d) Ministry - school relationship. There was an attempt to desist from the customary practice of top-down directives. Instead, a cooperative relationship was established, though there is no clear evidence that the participating teachers in

the laboratory schools actually perceived the relationship as such.

Seen against the background of the traditional practice of curricular reforms, the differences I have noted above must have appeared to be radical. Significantly, the term 'integrated' was later substituted by 'improved', so that the title of the project became 'The Development of an Improved Curriculum for the First Three Years of the Malaysian Primary Schools'. Perhaps the change in the terms was wisely intended to reduce the potential threat of a foreign 'integrated' curriculum, the term 'improved' being a euphemism which, in addition, heralded better things to come. In any case, the need for the Ministry to make a decision in 1980 whether to reject or accept the Integrated/Improved Curriculum was forestalled by the publication of the Cabinet Committee Report (1979), which led to the Education Minister's official announcement in December, 1980 that the primary curriculum would be thoroughly reviewed and a new curriculum would be implemented in 1983.

My review of the Integrated Curriculum Project would be incomplete if I did not bring to light the observations and insights made by Professor Raymond Adams and David Chen in their IIEP (International Institute for Educational Planning, UNESCO) study of the project. As we shall see

later, these tend to synchronize with my own perception of KBSR and some of the issues I raise. Calling the Malaysian project 'an experiment in systematic adaptation,' the authors note, first of all, that 'the whole thrust of contemporary Malaysian society is towards identity, integration and equity' (Adams and Chen, 1981, p. 149). They then provide a rationale for the particular curriculum project:

It is necessary then to have means for delivering education that are consistent with the new desired Malaysian image rather than those appropriate for the old undesired colonial one.....It is undoubtedly true that traditional, expository class-teaching methods tend to favour the advantaged pupil over the disadvantaged. Those children who come from an economically, socially and educationally rich environment tend consistently to do better than those who do not. Such a 'delivery method' thus serves to perpetuate existing conditions, ensuring that advantage stays with the advantaged and disadvantage with the disadvantaged. What presumably is needed is a delivery system that does not have such an effect.....a delivery system appropriate to the needs and aspirations of contemporary Malaysia. One that should permit differential treatment of pupils so that the disadvantaged obtain the kind of education that will help them to overcome their disadvantage.
(Adams and Chen, 1981, p. 150)

However, they point out that individualized instruction, catering for the different needs of children and compensatory education are concepts which have emerged in the Western world. Underlying this conception of education is a particular view of man in society. It places value on questioning, querying and discovering for oneself as the appropriate form of learning and the teacher should adopt a

guiding, supporting, non-directive posture. The question that arises then is: Is this kind of 'delivery system' compatible with Malaysian society? That the Malaysian curriculum reform has 'outside' overtones cannot be denied, and Adams and Chen seem to recognize the potential hazards that such a transplant might raise - 'at least at the outset'. They pose the following questions:

..... Might it sow the seeds of dissension between school and community? Might it isolate them from each other? Might it result in public demeaning of the educational profession in the eyes of the public? Might it incite a 'counter-culture' education? Might it subvert older values, driving a wedge between young and old? Might it, in other words, lead to social disintegration rather than the integration hoped for?
(Adams and Chen, 1981, p.150)

Earlier on I maintained that the Integrated Curriculum could be the precursor to KBSR. Now, having examined the Integrated Curriculum Project in some detail, I am in a position to reiterate that claim: the similarity between KBSR and the Integrated Curriculum Project is that both are attempts to introduce child-centredness into Malaysian primary schooling. It should be clear by now the Integrated Curriculum Project sought to replace the traditional curriculum with a child-centred one. Still, I should like to list below some of the expressions used in the Integrated Curriculum Project that indicate a penchant for child-centred education (I have emphasized them where they occurred in the foregoing pages). These are:

- one of the objectives of the project was 'to experiment with, evaluate and recommend improved teaching methods which are child-centred and activity-oriented'.
- children's classroom learning was to be changed from passive learning to 'active involvement in the learning process'.
- whole-class teaching was to be changed to 'teaching children individually or in small groups most of the time'.
- children were to be given 'some opportunity to decide what to learn.'

3. PRESSURES FOR CHANGE IN THE PRIMARY CURRICULUM

The CDC newsletter *Berita PPK* (CDC News) dated June 1981, under the headline 'Mengapa Kurikulum Baru?' (Why a New Curriculum?) pointed out that there was dissatisfaction with the prevalent primary education. This was due to a number of factors, including:

- duplication of content in the syllabuses and sometimes absence of any connection between subjects;
- syllabuses that were overloaded with information;
- pressures to complete the syllabuses especially in examination classes; and

- excessive dependence on textbooks, thus precluding the use of more interesting and effective teaching techniques.

The result was that a large number of pupils did not reach the level of achievement expected of them. This led to the recommendation of the Cabinet Committee (1979) that primary education be reviewed (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1981).

Dissatisfaction with primary education had, in fact, been brewing for quite some time. Early in the 1970s the press had expressed public concern over the lack of reading ability among some of the pupils who graduated from primary schools and, despite their deficiency, they were enrolled in secondary schools. The Ministry itself had, since the late 1960s, embarked upon a few projects to improve some aspects of primary education, such as the Projek Khas discussed earlier, but in the main these were 'crash' programmes designed for immediate implementation and proved to be ineffective. The year 1973 saw the publication of *Laporan Keciciran* (The Dropout Report); though this study primarily looked at attrition rates among primary and lower secondary school pupils, it did throw some light on certain unsatisfactory aspects of primary schools. This was followed by a study of the reading ability of primary school

pupils in Standard 2 and 6, conducted by the CDC in 1975. The nature of reading difficulties among these pupils was identified and the solutions recommended were 'in the area of group teaching, individualized teaching and peer teaching. At the same time the study also recommended an integrated curriculum and an integrated approach' (Aidah and Rohani, 1985, p.6). No doubt this led to the development of the Integrated Curriculum Project which I have discussed earlier.

The Cabinet Committee to review the implementation of the national education policy, set up in 1974, devoted a large part of its study to primary education. Its Report, published in 1979, noted several weaknesses found in primary education, particularly its curriculum. Among these were:

- the academic orientation of the primary curriculum, at the expense of acquisition of basic skills.
- the curriculum was 'overloaded' with facts and information, too heavy for children between the ages of 6-12 years.
- syllabus renewals were carried out without paying heed to inter-relationship between subjects.
- time - allocation for the teaching of each subject was rigid and did not cater for the different abilities of pupils.

- the curriculum was too difficult for weaker pupils and not sufficiently challenging for the brighter ones.
- the compartmentalisation of subjects did not contribute towards meaningful learning.
- some curricular contents were not related to the children's environment and foreign to them.
- as the primary curriculum had been developed based on the content of subjects, it had neglected the overall development of the child.
- weaknesses were found 'in the quality of teacher training, placement of trained teachers, supervision of teachers and the use of teaching aids. In addition, the school plan and design are not conducive for bringing about an ideal teaching-learning situation'

(Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1079a, para. 196).

These findings led the Committee to recommend, among other things, that 'the primary school curriculum be reviewed with a view to providing an education which has the capacity to fulfil the educational requirement for overall development, which encompasses aspects of basic education (reading, writing and arithmetic) as well as the development of the child's potential' (Recommendation 55).

The next step in the events leading to change was the CDC study on 'Level of Achievement of Primary School Pupils in Malaysia' conducted in 1979-1980. The study (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1980b) tested (a) reading and writing in Bahasa Malaysia for all grade levels, (b) Mathematics in the language of instruction for all grade levels and (c) proficiency in Bahasa Malaysia at the levels of Standards 2 and 4. The findings of this study established conclusively the unsatisfactory levels of achievement among primary school children - a large number of children did not master the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. For instance, at the Standard 6 level (after almost six years of primary schooling) the percentage of pupils who had acquired the basic skills expected of that level was as follows:

Table 1: Percentage of Pupils who had acquired Basic Skills in Standard 6

Basic skills School Type	Reading	Writing	Arithmetic
National Schools	93.0%	50.1%	37.8%
National Type Schools (Chinese)	59.8%	22.0%	47.9%
National Type Schools (Tamil)	59.8%	25.0%	30.5%

Source: Adapted from Laporan Taraf Pencapaian Murid-murid Sekolah Rendah di Malaysia [Report of Level of Achievement of Primary School Pupils in Malaysia]
Pusat Perkembangan Kurikulum, Kem. Pelajaran Malaysia, 1980.

During the latter half of the 1970s it became increasingly evident that the attention of parents, pupils, schools and teachers alike was focused on the national Standard 5 Assessment Examination, and the priority was for pupils to excel in this examination. Urban parents generally engaged private tutors for their children, or at least sent their children for extra 'tuition classes', to

ensure that they performed well. Incidentally, this practice rendered less effective the government's effort at providing equality of educational opportunity through standardised curricula and schools, since disadvantaged children in schools in the rural areas cannot afford the luxury of extra classes and coachings enjoyed by their urban counterparts. Schools and teachers were judged as 'good' or 'poor' depending on the results of the Standard 5 Assessment Examination: the more pupils achieved the maximum number of 5 A's (in the 'important' subjects of Bahasa Malaysia, English, Science, Mathematics and Social Science), the better the school and teachers. It was only natural, therefore, that teachers devoted all available time to cramming facts and information into their pupils and to training them to answer multiple-choice questions. Subjects such as Art and Physical Education were relegated to a secondary position and very often the periods allocated for them were used to 'cover' the 'important' subjects. Professor Awang Had Salleh, a noted Malaysian educationist and a trenchant critic of the primary curriculum, aptly summarised the situation as follows:

Aside from the overloaded curriculum in primary schools, there is the orientation towards teaching itself....Pupils are drilled to learn, to memorise facts. As a result, there is very little emphasis on affective education....Thinking and feeling, as well as internalization and the aesthetics are neglected.... Two-way interaction exists, but very biased towards teachers....Children's natural need to play, to be happy and to move about are stifled by the school.....

(Awang Had, 1980b, p.ix)

It was in the 1970s too that a senior official of the CDC carried out doctoral research and later made the following observation and suggestion:

individual capable of interacting in all spheres of social interaction. This is related to a wider issue of the
A pupil's growth and development are perhaps over-compartmentalised into inside and outside classroom experience. The pupil is taught to operate different subject areas, in different ways, in different social situations. This does not foster the development of a whole individual's ability to cope with adulthood and survival in a modern, technological society. The data from this study suggest a rethinking of the objectives of the curriculum, to include portions geared towards the development of the individual.

(Arfah, 1981, p.159; emphasis mine)

Significantly, this official was one of the architects of KBSR.

The Reports and studies cited above plus mounting pressure from the public finally led to the Minister of Education making an official announcement on 8th December 1980 that a new primary curriculum would be devised, to be tried out in 1982 and implemented across the nation in 1983.

4. Concluding Comments

The accounts of the infrastructure for curriculum development and past curriculum projects presented in this chapter seem to support the propositions I advanced earlier regarding the problem of centralised control and lack of teacher professionalism generally. Let me summarise and synthesize them below.

First, Malaysian curriculum development became institutionalised with the establishment of the CDC in 1973, and the current interpretation of curriculum is markedly different from the days when it was viewed merely as the selection of content for subjects to be taught. The CDC as a division in the Ministry of Education operates in a hierarchical relationship, as do other divisions in the Ministry itself. Consistent with this framework, the approach towards curriculum renewal has always been centre-periphery, customarily relying on directives. As I have shown in my review of past curriculum projects, this results in over-dependence on the centre and even apathy and detachment among the teachers. Even though wider participation in the curriculum development process is recognized as necessary, yet school-based curriculum development 'is not likely, nor is it desirable' (Asiah, 1980, p.70). We see here a conflict of values, brought about by the peculiarly Malaysian requisite for a standardized curriculum for all schools, deemed necessary in the interest of national integration.

Secondly, judging by the curriculum projects that I have reviewed, there seemed to be two major problems in primary education. One was under-achievement among pupils - in the areas of Science and Mathematics as identified by the Inspectorate's report of 1968, and in reading ability as diagnosed by the CDC study of 1975. The second problem was

lack of teaching competency among primary teachers generally. It is possible that the authorities attributed the former to the latter, so that under-achievement and teaching incompetence became a combined major problem which needed to be redressed urgently, hence the 'crash programmes' of the late 1960s and early 1970s. What is most significant is that the solution to this problem of teaching and learning in the classroom was sought for in the adoption of inquiry-based, individualized/group teaching-learning strategies and child-centred approaches as were evident in the Projek Khas and the Integrated Curriculum Project reviewed earlier. (See also Lewin (1981) for inquiry-based Malaysian secondary science curricula). By the late 1970s the problem had become magnified and was identified as a general problem of literacy and numeracy. Again, the remedy was sought in child-centred approaches, to be implemented through KBSR - as we shall see in the next chapter.

I have consistently argued that child-centred approaches demand a greater understanding and perception among teachers if they are to be implemented successfully, a demand which was unrealistically high in the case of Malaysian primary teachers generally, some of whom in the 1970s had only six years of schooling. Granted, there has been for some time a global trend towards favouring inquiry-based teaching and learning and an integrated curriculum approach, but one wonders whether such concepts are not sometimes misguidedly

applied in the Third World. In particular, it should be relevant to query the role played by international funding and foreign consultancy in determining the nature of curriculum reforms generally.

CHAPTER VI

KBSR - AN ANALYTICAL CONSIDERATION

This chapter examines KBSR, the New Primary School Curriculum, as a response to the recommendations of the Cabinet Committee (1979) which, as I have suggested earlier, could be interpreted as a call for change from the traditional curriculum to a child-centred curriculum. A thorough examination is attempted by analysing not only the official documents concerning KBSR such as the Blue Book*, but also its antecedents or initial formulations, its strategies for implementation, and the public response to it. These set the scene for the two chapters which will discuss the empirical data obtained through interviews and classroom observations respectively.

1. INITIAL FORMULATIONS

The pressures for change in the primary curriculum have been set out in the previous chapter. It is important to note

* Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia (1983a), Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah - Matlamat, Rasional, Bidang Pelajaran dan Strategi Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran [KBSR-Aims, Rationale, Areas of Study and Teaching and Learning Strategies]. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. Popularly referred to as the Blue Book because of its blue cover.

that of all the studies and reports concerning the problems of primary education, the Cabinet Committee Report of 1979 probably provided the 'clinch' for curriculum change in multi-racial Malaysia where education is a very sensitive issue and has often been politicized. The Cabinet Committee chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister at the time (presently the Prime Minister) had as its members other cabinet ministers from the component parties in the National Front government, each party visibly representing the interests of a racial community. Among its various sub-committees, one was the sub-committee on National Unity. In addition, the Cabinet Committee had taken into consideration views expressed in memoranda submitted by various persons, associations, clubs, unions, institutions, political organizations and others (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1979a, pp. 286-310). Presumably, then, the Committee had taken into account various sectional interests in its deliberations and it therefore provided the political legitimacy for the major change in primary curriculum.

The press statement regarding the change, made by the Minister of Education in December 1980, seems to contain the rudiments of the new primary curriculum. I elicit the major points made, as below:

1. The new curriculum was aimed at establishing a strong educational foundation especially in the three basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic.

2. It would consist of two phases, Phase I for Standards 1-3 and Phase II for Standards 4-6. During the first phase 75% of the time would be allocated for achieving the three basic skills; this would be reduced to 70% in the second phase.
3. During the first phase elements of compensatory and remedial education would be introduced to children who still had difficulties in mastering the basics at the end of the second year.
4. It was expected that 20% of children would be able to master the basic skills within two years. These children would be promoted to Standard 4, that is they would 'skip' Standard 3.
5. 'Academic elements' would be introduced only in the second phase and implemented through an integrated approach. The new curriculum would not be compartmentalised rigidly into subjects.
6. 'All aspects of education introduced would be based on the mental capacities of children at specific levels'.
7. 'The curriculum being devised was for the majority and not for the 10% or 20% children of high ability'.
8. 'Whether at the end of Phase I or Phase II, a pupil is efficient and ready to progress to the next level.

This effectively reduces the achievement gap among our pupils, as at the beginning of Phase II, pupils of high ability as well as those of average ability would have acquired the same skills'.

(Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1981b, pp.4-5; all emphases mine)

While some of the above statements may appear to be arbitrary and even discriminatory (as in no.7), it is not my intention to discuss such issues here. Suffice it to say that they represent the earliest thinking in the search for a new primary curriculum. For my purpose, what is relevant is to note in what way this early formulation reflect elements of child-centredness, if at all. It can be seen from the above statements that there was, at this initial stage, a greater concern for mastery of the basics-and so it should be, given that the problem to be redressed was illiteracy and under-achievement. But there were also some elements of child-centredness in the statements: an integrated approach to teaching-learning, a recognition of the mental capacities of children at specific levels and the introduction of compensatory and remedial education. It is possible that these elements have seeped through from the Integrated Curriculum Project and the Compensatory Education Project carried out by the CDC in the 1970s.

Following the official announcement made by the Education Minister, the CDC organized a series of discussions,

seminars and workshops concerning the new curriculum. One such session - possibly the most important in relation to the development of KBSR - was held on 23-25 January, 1981, in Port Dickson. This session was attended by Directors of the various Divisions in the Ministry of Education, State Education Directors, a few academics, headteachers and representatives of teaching unions. It was at this session that the CDC tendered for discussion a paper entitled 'General Education for Schools in Malaysia - A Proposal', which became the basis for the development of KBSR. As such, I shall quote extensively from this paper and discuss its implications.

The paper states, first all, that two 'fundamental principles' form the basis of general education. These are:

1. Education must produce a balanced individual, one who experiences overall development physically, intellectually and emotionally. Such an individual possesses self-confidence, is self-reliant and is able to become a responsible member of society.
2. Education must preserve [meet?] the needs and aspirations of the nation to create a society that is able to contribute to the nation and fulfil its manpower requirements.
(Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1980b, p.3; emphasis mine)

It can be seen from the above 'fundamental principles' that general education is conceptualized in peculiarly Malaysian terms. There is, in the above statements, a concern for producing a balanced individual; at the same time, 'the

needs and aspirations of the nation' are equally important, if not more overbearing.

The Paper then proposes that 'based on the above two principles' the planning of general education take the following 'factors' into account:

1. Individual Differences

Pupils have different experiences, capacities and learning achievement. The curriculum should therefore be suitable, relevant and appropriate with pupil abilities at each level of schooling for the sake of overall individual development. Learning experiences and materials must be graded to ensure the maximum development of the child's potentials and abilities.

2. Individual Achievement

The curriculum provided should enable the pupil to reach the minimum achievement level necessary and sufficient to develop his potential and abilities.

3. The Philosophy of Education

Statements on education must be based on a philosophy which is consistent with the national aspirations. An ideology based on the philosophy and theory of education characterised by 'humanism' will create a system of general education that not only emphasizes overall development of the individual but also ensures the formation of positive characters and personalities..... It will also lead to the practice of life-long education.

4. Continuous Education

General education is a continuous process from the first to the last levels of schooling. Even though schooling is structured into primary and secondary levels, learning experiences and activities must be a process which is continuous and according to appropriate strands.

5. Education for All

All children within schooling age will be given learning opportunities and facilities for eleven years. The

learning experiences provided must be suitable and relevant to the pupil's basic needs in order to prepare him to face any challenge or situation.

(Ibid, pp. 3-5; all emphases mine)

The 'factors' listed above, it seems to me, are not dissimilar with the concepts and ideals of child-centred education. But let me go further in my analysis of the Paper. With regard to the curriculum for general education, the Paper states:

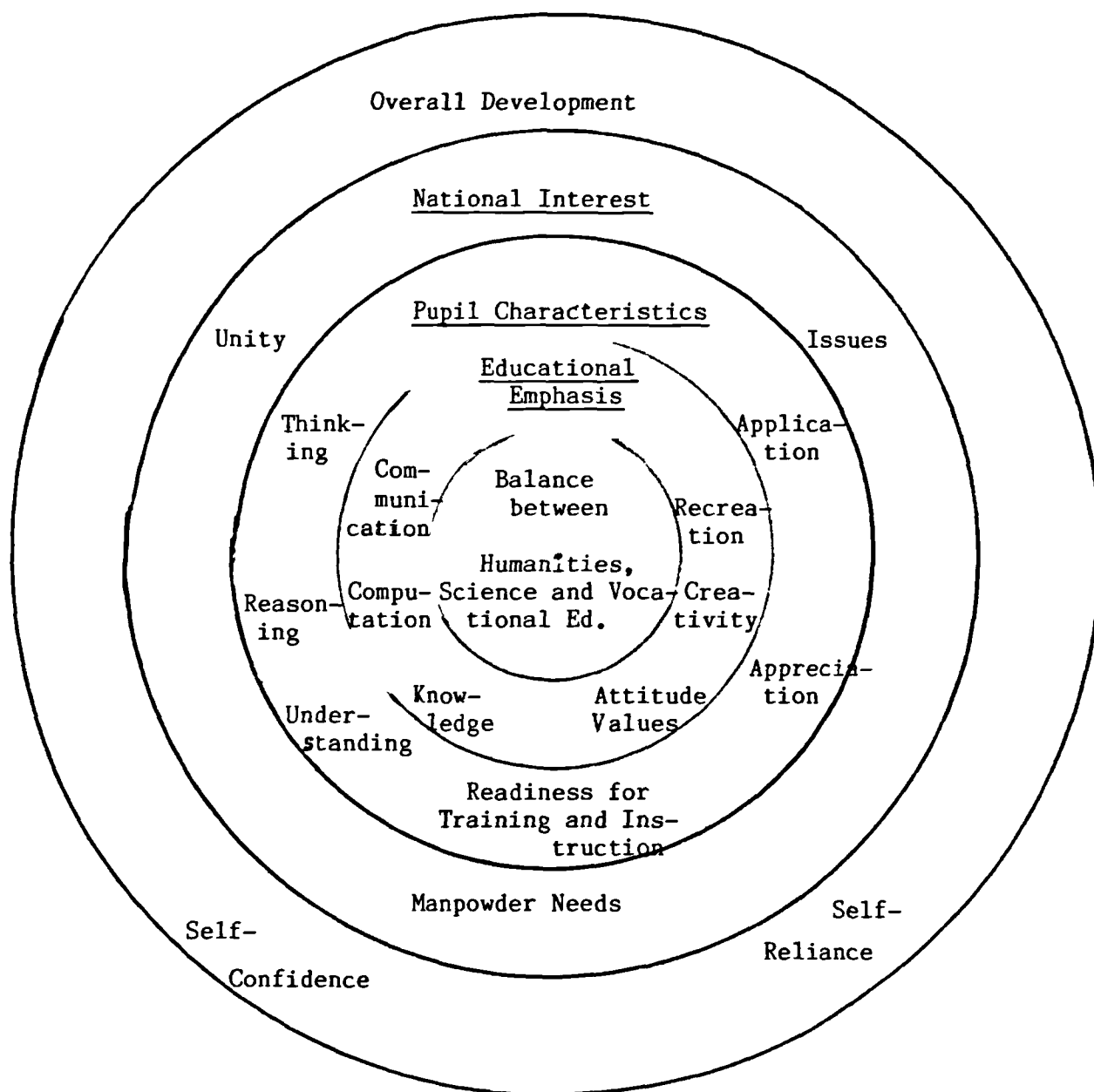
The curriculum design for general education proposed here is based on the fundamental principle of education, that is the overall development of the individual towards possessing characteristics of self-confidence and self-reliance. These characteristics will be achieved by sharpening and promoting the pupil's thinking [processes] and reasoning.....

Its implementation will be carried out within the framework of national aspirations and the principles of RUKUNEGARA [see Appendix 1] towards producing individuals who recognize, appreciate and uphold the national aspirations.....

(Ibid, p. 9)

The above curriculum proposal is depicted diagrammatically as in Figure 7. Here again it will be noticed that the proposed curriculum displays a concern for the overall development of the individual, but this noble intention is qualified, or limited, by the need to implement it 'within the framework of national aspirations.....' It is relevant to ask whether these two are in fact compatible, for the former logically leads to a stress on the individual aims of education while the latter stresses societal ends. Generally curriculum theorists typify these as the child-

FIG. 7: OVERALL CURRICULUM FOR GENERAL EDUCATION



Source: Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, Pusat Perkembangan Kurikulum (1980b), Rancangan Pendidikan Umum Untuk Sekolah-Sekolah di Malaysia - Satu Cadangan. [General Education for Malaysian Schools - A Proposal], p.8.

centred and society-centred positions in curriculum-making (see, for example, Smith, Stanley and Shores, 1950). It would demand a great deal of reflective thinking, conceptualization and planning to blend the two contradictory ends to produce a curriculum that is interactive in nature.

Specifically with regard to primary education, the Paper proposes that the following 'pupil characteristics' be the guideline in designing the primary curriculum:

1. Pupils at the primary school level are heterogeneous individuals because of their different mental and physical circumstances. Every child has his own level of achievement. Even so their potentials must be discovered and encouraged to develop. If necessary, compensatory and remedial facilities must be provided.
2. Some skills and attitudes take a long time to be mastered and developed. But there are also skills and attitudes that are time-consuming because of pupil differences. Efforts towards mastery of skills and formation of values must be started early. Attention must also be focused on providing compensatory education and remediation.
3. Knowledge and interaction in activities [activity learning?] are important components because they assist in promoting mental, physical and attitude development. If these components are well carried out, they will create and develop one's interest.
4. As far as possible interests must be promoted among individuals. This can be done by having interesting activities, by selecting knowledge that is suitable and appropriate, or by designing activities in the form of recreation and games.
(Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1980b, pp. 10-11)

It can be seen from the above that the proposed primary curriculum would be based on child-centred concerns - recognizing individual differences, providing compensatory and remedial education, promoting overall development and cultivating interests. The Paper further suggests 'Areas of Emphasis' in the curriculum, these being:

- Basic Skills
- Communication
- Knowledge
- Creativity and Recreation
- Attitude and Values

Without going into the details of each 'area', it is worth pointing out that these 'areas' seem to have been tentatively suggested as the components of a primary curriculum which takes into account child-centred factors and child-centred pupil characteristics, as noted earlier. Presumably, they were conceptualized as the 'worthwhile knowledge' - to quote Herbert Spencer - that would lead to the overall and balanced development of the child.

2. KBSR - ITS CURRICULAR FRAMEWORK

KBSR, the curriculum implemented in pilot-form in 302 schools in 1982 and launched nation-wide in 1983, seem to have ensued from the Paper on General Education. I shall examine some of its official documents, especially the

aforementioned Blue Book - 'The New Primary School Curriculum: Aims, Rationale, Areas of Study and Teaching and Learning Strategies' (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1983a). The Education Minister's 'Foreword' in this book states that it forms the basis for the development of syllabuses, teacher's guides and other curricular materials, and that various members of the community have contributed to it, namely educators, members of teachers' unions, academics, other professionals and individuals.

Let me examine, first of all, the underlying philosophy of KBSR , which is presented under the heading 'The Philosophy of Primary Education' in the Blue Book (see Appendix II). It will be remembered that the Paper on General Education, as discussed earlier, is imbued with child-centred characteristics. Likewise, the KBSR philosophy as outlined in the Blue Book indicates a belief in child-centred education. I note especially the following child-centred conceptual apparatuses explicitly stated in it:

- acquiring skills and knowledge through direct experiences.
- experiences that are suitable and relevant
- interesting activities
- active involvement of the pupils
- principle of flexibility

- opportunities for self-expression through music, art, etc.
- nurturing children's creativity
- evaluation as an integral part of classroom activities
- real-life experiences
- exchange of ideas and opinions
- understanding and cooperation
- classroom climate that encourages thinking and questioning
- overall development
- balanced development.

(Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1983a, p.4)

The aims of KBSR are found under the heading 'The Aims of Primary Education' in the Blue Book. It is stated that:

KBSR is guided by the rationale that primary education should be in the form of basic education. Therefore the aim of primary education is to ensure the overall development of the pupil. This development encompasses the intellectual, spiritual, physical and emotional aspects as well as the development of potential, character, aesthetic and social values.

The curriculum is designed to provide equal opportunity to every pupil to acquire the necessary skills, knowledge, values and attitudes. Encouragement and guidance are given to every pupil to master the basic skills. In addition, opportunities are provided to enable pupils to develop their potentials, interests and creativity.

(Ibid, p. 5)

Following the above preamble is a list of ten objectives of KBSR, ranging from the mastery of Bahasa Malaysia, English

and the languages of instruction, to mastery of mathematical skills and learning skills, to the development of potential as well as enabling pupils to understand, appreciate and be involved in artistic and recreational activities. These objectives, I must note, are consistent with the child-centred rhetoric expressed in the KBSR philosophy.

KBSR is divided into two phases: Phase I covers the first three years, during which time it is expected that pupils would have mastered the basic skills thoroughly; Phase II covers the next three years and during this time, beside consolidating the basic skills, 'new knowledge' is introduced. The areas of study in KBSR are based on Recommendation 57(a) of the Cabinet Committee Report (1979) that the new primary curriculum be planned 'to enable pupils to acquire skills in three basic areas, namely Communication, Man and His Environment and Individual Self-Development consistent with the needs, interests, potentials and mental capacities of the pupils as well as their readiness' (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1979a, p. 242). This is best depicted in Table 2. In addition, there is a definite time allocation for each area of study, as shown in Figures 8 and 9.

With respect to the subjects taught within each area of study, I should like to comment selectively on some of them. In the languages and mathematics, there is no doubt

Table 2: KBSR - AREAS OF STUDY, COMPONENTS AND SUBJECTS

AREA	COMPONENT	SUBJECT	
		PHASE I	PHASE II
COMMUNI- CATION	Basic Skills	* Medium of instruction, Bahasa Malaysia, English Language	Medium of instruction Bahasa Malaysia English Language
		Mathematics	Mathematics
MAN AND HIS ENVIRON- MENT	Spiritua- lity, Values & Attitudes	** Islamic Religious Education	Islamic Religious Education
		** Moral Education	Moral Education
	Humanities and Environ- ment	—	Man and His Environment
INDIVI- DUAL SELF DEVELOP- MENT	Art and	Music	Music
		Art Education	Art Education
	Recrea- tion	Physical Education	Physical Education

* The Medium of instruction for National Primary Schools is Bahasa Malaysia. The medium of instruction for National-type Primary Chinese Schools is Chinese and for the National-type Primary Tamil Schools is Tamil.

** When Muslim pupils along with others who choose Islamic Religious Education learn the subject, other pupils are required to study Moral Education.

Source: Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia (1983a), Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah - Matlamat, Rasional, Bidang Pelajaran dan Strategi Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran [The New Primary School Curriculum - Aims, Rationale, Areas of Study and Teaching and Learning Strategies], p. 26. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka.

FIG. 8: TIME ALLOCATION PER WEEK - PHASE I

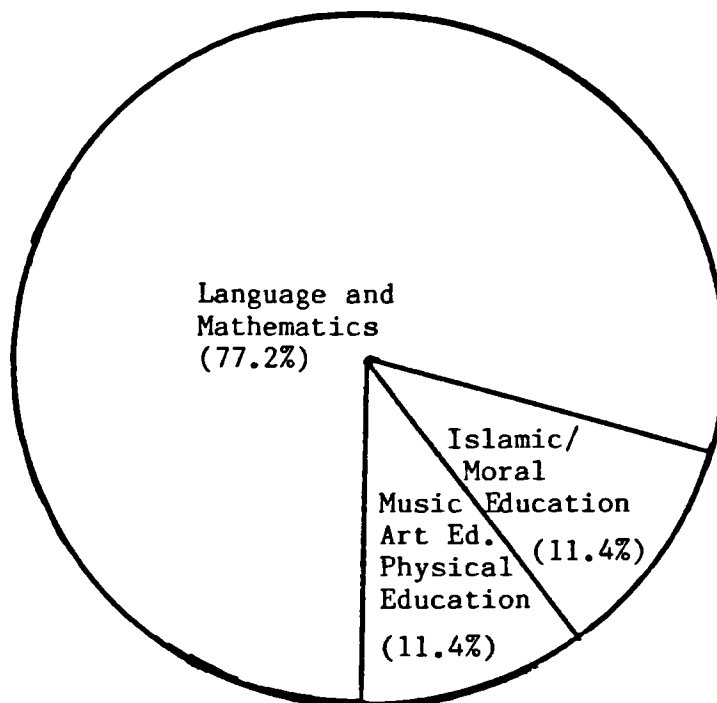
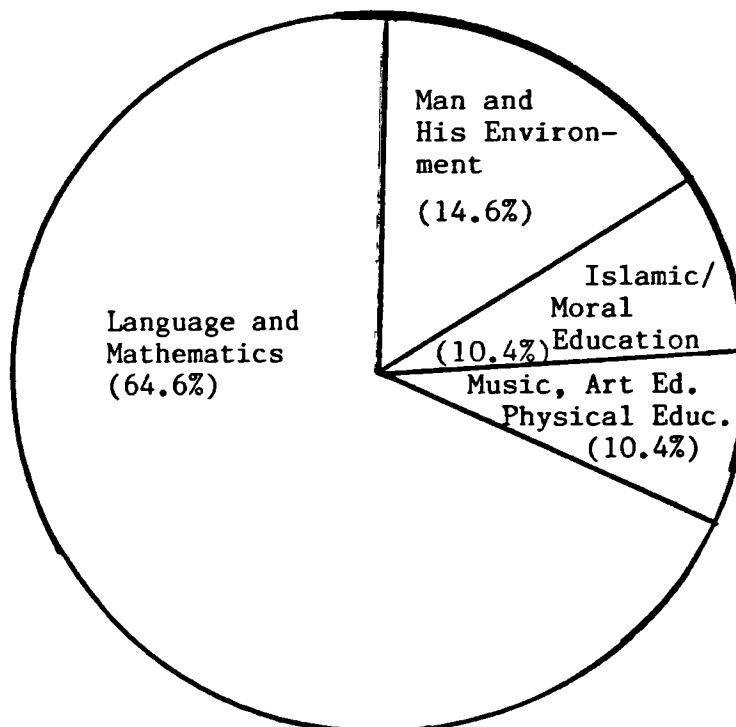


FIG. 9: TIME ALLOCATION PER WEEK - PHASE II



Source: Adapted from Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia (1983a), Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah - Matlamat, Rasional, Bidang Pelajaran dan Strategi Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran [KBSR - Aims, Rationale, Areas of Study and Teaching and Learning Strategies], pp. 11 and 12. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

that the primary objective is the mastery of the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, for 'Communication is a basic necessity of life. It is carried out through the medium of languages and involves computational skills' (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1983a, p.7). I want to look more closely at Moral Education and Man^{and} His Environment, these being two new subjects, not available in the old primary curriculum. With regard to Moral Education, it is stated in the Blue Book:

The Moral Education syllabus for primary schools contains twelve values. These values are based on the religions, traditions and norms of the multi-racial Malaysian society, as well as universal human values that are consistent with the principles of RUKUNEGARA.....

Moral Education aims to produce pupils of good character, able to make responsible decisions based on the moral values of the individual, his family, community and society. The specific objectives of Moral Education are to enable pupils:

1. to practise habits and behaviour that are consistent with moral attitudes and values;
2. to be aware of the values upheld by their society;
3. to have moral values as the basis for developing their mental maturity;
4. to weigh matters, based on moral values, before practising certain behaviours.
5. to advance rational reasons when making decisions concerning moral issues.
(Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1983a, p. 20; all emphases mine)

Two matters in the above citation deserve to be commented upon. First, universal human values that are not consistent with the principles of RUKUNEGARA (see Appendix I) are not

acceptable. By definition, some universal human values are no longer 'universal' when applied within the Malaysian context. One example comes readily to mind: religious freedom is normally acknowledged as a universal value, but in the Malaysian context such freedom would not, presumably, include the practice of atheism since one of the principles of RUKUNEGARA is 'Belief in God'. Secondly, it is conceivable that sometimes the values of the individual might conflict with those of society. How are such issues to be resolved in Moral Education? Would 'rational reasons' triumph over conformity? I shall bear these questions in mind when looking at the empirical data later.

The objectives of teaching the subject Man and His Environment are to enable pupils:

1. to know and understand several aspects of man, humanity and the environment generally;
2. to know and understand basic information concerning the earth and mankind;
3. to know and understand that human interaction brings about changes and renewals;
4. to know and understand that interaction between man and his environment leads to changes and renewals;
5. to use skills of observation, investigation, prediction and reasoning in decision-making;
6. to be sensitive towards environmental problems and issues;
7. to be aware of, and to develop, attitudes and values that reflect the national identity.

(Ibid, pp. 21-22; emphasis mine)

It is stated in the Blue Book that Man and His Environment 'encompasses elements from Geography, Science, History, Civics, Health, and other knowledge concerning man and his environment' (Ibid, p.21). In the above list of objectives, the most significant is objective 5. I would consider the use of 'skills of observation, investigation, prediction and reasoning in decision-making' as an unrealistically high demand on KBSR teachers. As such, I shall bear this in mind when analysing the empirical data. It should also be noted that this objective can be interpreted as discovery learning or inquiry learning, both of which are conceptual apparatuses in child-centred pedagogy.

The teaching-learning strategies advocated in KBSR are consistent with its child-centred philosophy. These are stated as follows:

Teaching and learning strategies..... are to stimulate and reinforce pupil interest towards learning..... Every pupil will participate actively in various activities..... The teaching techniques employed must be appropriate to pupils' [level of] development and abilities, so that learning is interesting, effective and meaningful..... Teachers are encouraged to carry out various activities, using teaching-learning materials suited to pupils' abilities, capacities, potentials and interests. The integrated approach is important in the teaching-learning process..... Pupils' performance are simultaneously monitored during the teaching-learning process so that steps for remediation and enrichment can be taken where necessary.

(Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1983a, p. 27)

Evaluation in KBSR seems to represent a major departure from the old practice of testing and examination;

predictably so, perhaps, considering that one of the weaknesses of the old curriculum was that it was too examination-oriented. Evaluation has taken a different meaning, consistent with the child-centred philosophy of KBSR. Consider the following statements:

The main aim of KBSR is to ensure the overall development of the individual..... As such, the evaluation system in KBSR should emphasize not only [academic] achievement but also the development of their potentials as well as peer relationship.....

Two types of evaluation will be introduced, namely, formative and summative evaluation.....

The new evaluation system suitable for KBSR has the following characteristics:

- a) it is not centralised at the national level;
- b) it is aimed at improving learning and remedial work;
- c) it is in various forms;
- d) it is carried out continuously so that weaknesses are not cumulative;
- e) it is constructed, administered and examined by the teachers themselves.

..... Two methods of evaluation will be carried out, namely informal such as observation, oral questioning or quiz, and formal evaluation such as paper and pencil tests or check lists All aspects of basic skills (3Rs) as well as affective components such as interest, attitude and the aesthetics must be evaluated.

(Ibid, pp. 28-29)

Compared with the standardised examinations in the old curriculum, the KBSR evaluation system is indeed a major change. It demands a higher level of professionalism and skilfulness from the teachers. Unless teachers are given sufficient in-service training before KBSR is implemented, it is rather unrealistic to expect them to be able to cope with informal evaluation, formative evaluation or evaluating

the 'affective components'.

A programme of remediation and enrichment forms an integral part of KBSR. It is based on the recognition of individual differences among pupils and the need to provide equal opportunity for all. Children who achieve the targeted level of achievement are to be given enrichment while those who do not are to be given remedial activities. As explained in the Blue Book,

Through the enrichment programme pupils will be able to expand their knowledge on matters related to the learning units horizontally. In the meantime pupils who are given remedial activities have the opportunity to overcome the weaknesses that they face in the same learning units. In this way, all pupils will be able to begin a [new] learning unit together.

(Ibid, p. 30)

The above rationale looks deceptively simple. In reality, however, many questions may be raised. Here I just want to point out that it seems to be assumed that teachers have, or will have, the skills to carry out the enrichment and remediation programmes, when in fact they were not acquainted with these during their initial training. Again, unless the in-service training given before they implement KBSR take cognizance of this factor, it is most unlikely that the plan for remediation and enrichment will be effected.

Another important KBSR document is the Yellow Book* (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1981a), which contains information on several other aspects of KBSR. One of its chapters focuses on classroom organization and management. It will be noticed from the following extract that the classroom organization advocated is consistent with the child-centred philosophy of KBSR:

Classroom organization is important because the teaching and learning strategies suggested involve various activities..... a flexible classroom arrangement is necessary. It does not remain the same from the beginning to the end of the year, as is the normal practice now. Within the context of KBSR, every object and space in the classroom must have a definite function..... The classroom organisation should encourage teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil interaction as well as interaction between pupils and learning materials..... desks are to be arranged in groups. This will enable the teacher to interact with pupils in small groups..... Pupils are able to interact among themselves within their groups. In this way pupils will be able to learn from their peers, a situation which promotes social development and a spirit of cooperation..... In KBSR group teaching and individualized teaching are preferred. However, teaching the class as a whole is still necessary at certain times.....

(Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1981a, pp. 8-9)

* Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia (1981a), Buku Panduan Am Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah [General Guide to KBSR]. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. Popularly referred to as the Yellow Book because of its yellow cover.

Teachers are also advised to set up a reading corner, art corner and other suitable learning 'spaces'. At the reading corner various reading cards, books, magazines, cassettes, tapes and educational games are to be made available. Children's products are to be displayed at a suitable corner, along the walls or strung above the children (Ibid, pp. 12 - 25).

The Yellow Book devotes a chapter to the role of the KBSR teacher. Here again the guiding principle is obviously child-centredness. As stated in this document,

In this curriculum [KBSR] , attention is focused on the pupil and not the teacher. The teacher is no longer a dispenser of knowledge at all times, he is more of a facilitator for learning. Generally, changes that will affect the role of the classroom teacher include the following:

1. The teacher is expected to use his creativity to a greater degree.....
2. The teacher is expected to give appropriate attention and to cater to [the needs of] every child, including taking remedial steps or giving enrichment right from the beginning.....

This curriculum also provides ample opportunities for the teacher to modify [curriculum] materials according to the environment. Through the efforts and creativity of the teacher, modification will make a lesson interesting and meaningful and will lead to effective learning.

(Ibid, p.33)

There follows an exhortation that in order to 'internalise' the new curriculum, it is necessary for teachers to understand its philosophy, rationale, aims and objectives. Only then will they understand 'the directions to be taken',

and it will also convince teachers regarding the roles they have to play (Ibid, pp. 33-34). Teachers are reminded that children form 'a special group - different from adults', and that every child is unique. They are urged to create an attractive environment for children, beginning with establishing a rapport with their pupils. 'An effective teacher is one who is trusted by his/her pupils' (Ibid, p.37). Teachers must know every pupil individually, knowing his interests, his problems and his emotional state. In addition, teachers must be able to demonstrate that they want to help pupils solve their problems (Ibid).

Two things in the above advice for teachers need to be commented upon. First, the exhortation to teachers to understand the rationale and philosophy of KBSR is well-placed. As I have pointed out in earlier chapters, changing to a child-centred curriculum entails changes not only in classroom practices but also in the philosophical-pedagogical assumptions underlying these practices. The problem in KBSR is that this rationale-philosophy aspect has not been given enough emphasis. The Blue Book and the Yellow Book are two of the few documents that refer to this matter, but a recent study indicates that teachers are more likely to utilize syllabuses and guides to teaching specific subjects than these two general books, the reason being that they find the former to be more useful as they contain 'the necessary explanations and suggestions for teaching of

all the units' (Siti Hawa, 1986, p. 169). The second point I want to note is that it seems highly optimistic to expect KBSR teachers teaching a classroom of 40-50 children to know them well individually. In all probability, knowing all the children's interest, problems and emotional state remains an ideal.

The above analysis of several aspects of KBSR, extracted from two basic KBSR documents, has demonstrated that KBSR is a child-centred curriculum, with the overall development of the child as its ultimate aim. As we have seen, a major proportion of the time is allocated to the 3Rs, and it may well be argued - as has been the case in the United States, for instance - that the preponderance of the 3Rs indicates a 'return to the basics', a practice which is generally antithetical to child-centredness. But in the Malaysian context, emphasis on the 3Rs is based on the rationale that skills of communication - 'through the use of language and involving computational activities' - are basic human needs (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1983a, p. 7). The basic skills, then, are seen as necessary foundations for overall development. Having said that, however, I must make a note of what appears to me to be an inconsistency. In the Blue Book, under the heading 'Background' [to KBSR], recommendation 2a of the 1979 Cabinet Committee Report is cited in bold capitals (Ibid, p.3), and this recommendation reads: '..... that the Ministry of Education take

appropriate measures to ensure that education at the primary level be in the form of basic education, with emphasis on the 3Rs, that is reading, writing and arithmetic'. As I have pointed out in Chapter 1, the effect of considering only this recommendation on primary education and discounting the rest can be very misleading. Likewise, the 'Foreword' in the Yellow Book states, 'This New Primary School Curriculum emphasizes the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic' (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1981a) and makes no mention of overall development. Taken on their own, these recommendation and statement are inconsistent with the rest of the content of the two documents and are potentially misleading.

3. Implementation Strategies

In Chapter 4 I gave an account of the hierarchical organizational structure of education in Malaysia, and this theme was carried further in Chapter 5 when the framework for curriculum development was examined. The point was made that, consistent with this hierarchical structure, the favoured model of curriculum change in most instances was the RDD. With the introduction of KBSR, however, this centre-periphery practice has been modified. It was decided that the implementation of KBSR would be 'based on the principle of decentralisation, whereby various sections will be given specific tasks^{and responsibilities. The aim is to encourage involvement} and full participation by the

states, districts and schools' (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1983b, p.6). I might perhaps add that as KBSR is a major change compared to previous piece-meal, subject-based curriculum renewals, it was necessary to get the involvement of other agencies in order to make nation-wide implementation of KBSR at all feasible. Thus, several Divisions in the Ministry and state Departments of Education (DOEs) are involved in the implementation of KBSR.

In 1982 when KBSR was first tried out in 302 schools, the CDC was directly responsible for only 25 schools while the rest became the responsibility of state DOEs. The responsibility of monitoring the 'trial' of KBSR was thus shared by the CDC and the state DOEs. At the outset the CDC was also responsible for organizing exposure/orientation courses for officers in other Divisions and the state DOEs 'so that these officers will be able to play their roles effectively in the trial and implementation of KBSR' (Asiah, 1981, p. 8). The CDC also undertook the responsibility of training some Key Personnel and the in-service training of teachers for Phase I of KBSR, initially. The Schools Division is responsible for the training of teachers for Phase II. The Inspectorate is responsible for providing advisory and supervisory services. In fact, several other divisions are involved in the implementation of KBSR. The need for cooperation and coordination among the various agencies led to the setting up of committees at different

levels (see Table 3). It can be seen that the state DOEs have been expected to change their role from receiving directives to more active involvement. During the trial period they had to decide on the selection of suitable schools for trials and on the frequency and nature of supervision and monitoring to be taken. In the actual implementation of KBSR, the state DOEs are responsible for: (a) conducting orientation courses for in-service teachers, including determining the strategies to be used, the content and duration of the courses, presentation techniques, etc.; (b) preparation of facilities in schools, such as providing musical instruments for the Music component of KBSR; and (c) the sustenance of KBSR in schools (Asiah, 1981, pp. 12-13). The implication of this change in role is that the DOEs need more professional personnel as well as more financial allocation. A more relevant question, perhaps, in view of the hierarchical administrative structure, is to ask to what extent the state DOEs can, or will, take action and make independent decisions without referring to the central agencies.

In Chapter 1 and at various other points later, I made the claim that changing from the traditional to a child-centred curriculum implies a fundamental change in which a clear understating of the philosophical - pedagogical assumptions of child-centred education is an essential ingredient. Without this ingredient, the change that

Table 3: KBSR Committees at various Levels

Level and Committee	Membership	Tasks
Ministry level: KBSR Implementation Committee	Chairman: Deputy Director Gen. of Ed. II. Members: Directors of all professional Divisions and state DOEs and Heads of appropriate administrative Divisions. Secretariat: Curriculum Development Centre.	To decide on policies and oversee implementation of KBSR, study financial implications, coordinate courses for teachers.
Ministry level: KBSR Technical Committee	Chairman: Deputy Director Gen. of Ed. II. Members: KBSR coordinators from the state DOEs and professional Divisions, officers from appropriate administrative Divisions. Secretariat: Curriculum Development Centre.	To deal with administrative matters and coordinate implementation and activities at the state level.
State level: State Implementation Committee	Chairman: State Director of Ed. Members: professional officers of DOE, representatives of Headteachers, Inspectorate and Training Colleges. Secretariat: KBSR Unit of DOE.	To detail implementation activities at state, district and school levels, to manage finances.
District level: District Implementation Committee	Chairman: District Education Officer. Members: Representatives of Headteachers, teachers and Parent-Teacher Associations.	To plan implementation activities at the district level.
School level: School KBSR Committee	Chairman: Headteacher Members: KBSR and other teachers.	To provide assistance and guidance, construct instructional materials and evaluate progress of KBSR

Source: Adapted from Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia (1983b), Berita KBSR, 2:1, pp. 6-7.

transpires can only be characterised as superficial. It is relevant, therefore, that I look briefly at a few KBSR orientation courses - an important strategy in the implementation process - to consider whether this ingredient has been given sufficient weight.

Among the earliest KBSR orientation courses were those conducted by the CDC in 1982 to train Key Personnel (KPs). These KPs were selected from experienced, primary teachers to assist the state DOEs in the supervision and guidance of KBSR teachers. Between April and June, 1982, 512 KPs were trained by the CDC and subsequently they trained other KPs and teachers at the state and district levels, thus effecting a cascade training strategy. The initial course for the KPs was for a duration of three weeks, providing them with an exposure to the various aspects of KBSR as a whole and to the Year I programme in particular. The objectives of the course were stated as:

- to explain the background, rationale, philosophy and aims of KBSR;
- to explain the specification of the curriculum and the new elements contained in it;
- to explain the teaching and learning strategy;
- to develop positive attitudes toward the curriculum;
- to develop certain skills for implementation of the curriculum.

(Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1982a, p.7)

These statements of objectives are reminiscent of the top-down, centre-periphery change practices of earlier curriculum projects: the KPs, and subsequently the teachers, are clearly at the receiving end of a curriculum already developed at the centre. Thus the basic model for KBSR remains the same, the RDD model. Decentralisation in the context of KBSR merely means that the state DOEs are expected to devise their own plans for implementation.

The course designed for the KPs covered several topics as depicted in Table 4. It can be seen that a major proportion of the course was devoted to the practical aspects of KBSR such as preparation of teaching materials, teaching strategies and classroom evaluation. In contrast, the theoretical aspects of KBSR received scant attention; its rationale and philosophy, for instance, was allocated only two out of ninety two hours for the whole course while major concepts in the teaching and learning strategies were dealt with in merely six hours. KP courses held by the CDC in 1983, 1984 and 1985 were only for a period of one week, while those conducted by state DOEs were even of shorter periods - the state of Selangor, for example, trained eighty eight KPs in August, 1982, over a four-day period. One wonders to what extent the underlying concepts of KBSR were explained, if at all, since the content of the original, three-week course was presumably condensed or reduced to fit into the much shorter time schedule. Yet these are the

Table 4: Content of the KP Course, 1982

Topic	Duration	Methods of Presentation
1. The background, rationale, philosophy and aims of KBSR.	2 hours	Lecture, question-and-answer
2. Structure of KBSR	2 hours	Lecture, question-and-answer
3. Major concepts in the teaching and learning strategy	6 hours	Lecture, question-and-answer
4. Techniques in the preparation of teaching materials	12 hours	Workshop, practical sessions
5. Detailed explanation for each subject: objectives, content, teaching strategy, instructional materials and activities	24 hours	Lecture, discussion, demonstration, workshop
6. Multiple-class teaching	4 hours	Lecture, question-and-answer
7. Classroom evaluation	30 hours	Lecture, workshop, practical sessions
8. The role of the teacher	2 hours	Lecture, question-and-answer
9. The management of training	10 hours	Lecture, question-and-answer
Total	92 hours	

Source: Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, Pusat Perkembangan Kurikulum (1982a), Laporan Kursus Kakitangan Penting (Asas) untuk Pelaksanaan KBSR 1982 [Report of the (basic) Key Personnel Course for Implementation of KBSR, 1982], cited in Siti Hawa (1986), p. 180.

personnel who are expected to train and guide teachers in the implementation of KBSR.

Similarly, when the Inspectorate held a four-day course for its inspectors in August, 1983, its emphasis was on the practical aspects of KBSR, as is testified by its course objectives which were stated as:

- a) to enable every inspector of schools to understand further the teaching approaches for all subjects in KBSR.
- b) to produce samples of Lesson Plans and instructional materials for every subject in KBSR for Year I and II.
(Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1983b, p. 11)

As we shall see later in the empirical data, various misunderstandings of concepts arise as KBSR is implemented at the state, district and school levels. I would suggest that the neglect of the theoretical basis of KBSR, as indicated above, partly contributes to this state of affairs.

4. PUBLIC RESPONSE

When the Education Minister announced, on 8 December 1980, that a new primary curriculum would be implemented in 1983, it was widely acclaimed by the public. As noted earlier, at this initial stage the stress was on the mastery of the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic. The proposed new curriculum was therefore referred to variously as the '3R

curriculum', the '3R system' and the '3R scheme', and these terms were used for quite some time until the official version 'KBSR' was introduced, possibly to dispel the misconception that the curriculum consist of only the 3Rs.

Public support for the new curriculum was evident from the press coverage of the announcement and subsequent headlines. The editorial in the New Straits Times of 9 December, 1980, was a typical reaction. It hailed the proposed curriculum as 'an act of courage', stating:

It has been clear for some time that the primary school curriculum was overloaded. Datuk Musa has had the courage to opt for a radical overhaul rather than give us a safe pruning job. For once we are responding to our own educational needs and formulating a system that takes into account our particular problems. Parents, teachers and educationists will no doubt join us in expressing overwhelming support of the new curriculum as the principles behind the two-phase syllabus are eminently sound.

(New Straits Times, 9. 12 . 1980)

However, the following month an opposition political party charged that the new curriculum was an attempt to 'change the character' of national-type Chinese and Tamil primary schools. This claim was based on the fact that, initially, the support materials prepared for teachers were available only in Bahasa Malaysia and not in Chinese or Tamil. Another bone of contention was that elements of Chinese culture, claimed the opposition, were not found in the content of Moral Education and Music. As language and culture are sensitive issues in multi-racial Malaysia, this

debate went on for a while until the Prime Minister 'cleared the doubts over 3Rs' (the National Echo, 10.3.1982) in Parliament. Answering parliamentary questions, the Prime Minister pointed out that the 3R curriculum was based on the recommendation of the Cabinet Committee (1979) whose members consisted of Members of Parliament representing various component parties of the National Front, and that Chinese and Tamil would continue to be used as mediums of instruction in the primary schools, along with Bahasa Malaysia. Subsequently the teaching-learning materials prepared by the CDC were translated into Chinese and Tamil for these schools, and Chinese and Tamil songs were added to the Music syllabus.

When KBSR was implemented nation-wide in 1983, the press highlighted the demand it made upon teachers. It was reported that some teachers had to spend about eight hours daily preparing various teaching materials at home. Some headteachers commented that their KBSR teachers were 'dead tired' by the time they entered their classrooms in the morning after working till dawn to prepare their materials (New Straits Times, 7.4.1983). The NUTP claimed that many KBSR teachers had become 'overworked zombies', in addition to pointing out that the grouses of the teachers included:

- lack of essential basic teaching aids and teaching apparatus;

- inadequate/ineffective crash training programmes;
- problems in time-table planning, and
- noise pollution in non-partitioned classrooms.

(Ibid, 11.7.1983)

Based on a survey conducted in 600 primary schools in Malaysia, the NUTP also disclosed that KBSR teachers were 'uncertain of the methods and techniques to adopt', that they were confused 'because of conflicting instructions from superiors' and that 60 percent of the teachers in the survey 'felt they were not adequately trained for the new curriculum and hence were not confident to teach' (New Straits Times, 25.7.1983). Subsequently the Minister of Education took various steps to reduce the workload of teachers, including mass-producing workbooks for pupils. This step was reported to please parents too, since they were used to seeing their children's homework during the previous curriculum and were not happy when, during the early part of KBSR implementation, they did not bring home exercise books. It can be seen from this turn of events that despite the original intention of individualizing work and encouraging teacher and pupil creativity, some standardization soon became necessary. In effect, despite the apparent welcome for the 'revolutionary' curriculum, neither teachers nor parents were ready for it.

5. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Despite initial haziness and lack of clarity, as shown in the original announcement by the Education Minister, on the whole KBSR comes out as a coherent programme for child-centred education, at least as it was planned. A possible explanation for this child-centredness is because it was based on a paper on General Education, which had earlier established that general education was the form of education appropriate for Malaysia, and its principles centred on the child as an individual. KBSR represents a major departure from the previous primary curriculum because of its child-centred philosophy, and the aims, areas of study, teaching-learning strategies, classroom organization, forms of evaluation and the role of the teacher it advocates. While a major proportion of the time allocation per week is devoted to the teaching of basic skills, this is seen as necessary in view of the fact that the original problem to be solved is illiteracy and under-achievement among primary pupils.

Unlike the usual practice in previous curriculum projects, KBSR also attempts a departure from the normal RDD model of change. Its research - though rather limited, undoubtedly, in view of the governmental/political pressure to implement it nation-wide in 1983 - was carried out at the centre; its development is to some extent shared with the

periphery as states, districts and schools are encouraged to develop their own instructional materials in addition to utilising the ones developed at the centre; but it is at the diffusion/dissemination stage that a decentralization procedure has been emphasized. As the administrative structure remains hierarchical, it is relevant to ask to what extent this attempt at devolution of responsibilities will be successful. This question will be answered when we look at the empirical data later.

In examining the initial implementation strategies of KBSR, I have noted that there seemed to be a neglect of its rationale and philosophy in the KBSR courses conducted - a neglect of the very essence necessary for understanding and thence implementing child-centred education, as I see it. Here perhaps is the point at which KBSR begins to change its character and is seen by implementors as a programme which emphasizes mastery of the basic skills as its ultimate aim rather than acquiring these skills as the foundations for overall development. In addition, the new curriculum as expounded in the KBSR documents seems to be different from the new curriculum as understood by the public at large. When the new curriculum was first announced, the emphasis was mastery of the basics, and this emphasis was further amplified by the press. At least for about three years, from 1980-1983, educational discussion was focused on the '3R system'. It can be argued, of course, that KBSR

represents the actual new primary curriculum, produced after mature deliberations, but public opinion had been set earlier by the press coverage of the 3Rs and very little was mentioned of overall development then. There is, therefore, a possible dichotomy between KBSR as it was planned and as it has been implemented. I shall seek to verify this in the two chapters that examine the empirical data.

At this juncture it is appropriate to draw a comparison between child-centred^d education in Malaysia and progressivism in the United States and England as discussed in Chapter 2. The circumstances that brought about the emergence of child-centredness in Malaysia are in some ways similar, and at the same time dissimilar, with those in the United States and England. When KBSR was introduced, Malaysia shared with the other two countries a criticism of, and dissatisfaction with, contemporary schooling. All three countries, in a way, looked to the schools to provide a panacea for society's ills, but the specific purposes were different. In the United States progressive education initially emerged as a response to industrialism, with its concomitant problems of sheer growth of knowledge and the perceived need to Americanize immigrants. In England, while industrialism was an important factor, the cause of progressivism was greatly advanced by an abhorrence of the war and the hope for a better future through an education that stressed freedom and individualism. It is possible to say that Malaysia

faces the problem of forging a Malaysian national identity out of its multi-ethnic population (see Chapter 4), just as the United States felt the need to Americanize its immigrant population. But the child-centred discourse in Malaysia does not seem to be directly or overtly linked with uniting its disparate peoples; in this respect KBSR is merely a continuation of the existing provision of common schooling, with a common-content curriculum for all. When KBSR was formulated the basic concern, as we have seen, was illiteracy and under-achievement. Clearly in a country where education 'must contribute to the nation and fulfil its manpower requirement' (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1980b, p. 3), a literate population for the expanding economy was high on the priority list. It may therefore be seen as incongruous that the new curriculum emerged as it did in the form of KBSR, embracing overall development and its implications for child-centredness rather than merely serving to ensure the achievement of literacy. One possible explanation for this is the influence of global trends in education towards the recognition of individual differences, inquiry-based learning and flexible and integrated curriculum. These, as we have seen, were elements present in the paper on General Education which became the basis for the development of KBSR. Secondly, no doubt the experience of past primary curriculum projects such as Projek Khas and the Integrated Curriculum Project, both of which embodied

child-centred concepts and practices, contributed towards the formulation of the new curriculum.

Child-centred education in Malaysia also contrasts sharply with progressivism in the United States and England in another important way. In these two countries, progressivism encompassed various strands of social protest and reform movements; though their spokesmen/women were many, the most notable were John Dewey in the United States and Edmond Holmes in England, each with their own 'gospel'. There is no such 'prophet' for child-centred education in Malaysia, unfortunately. With the exception of education lecturers in the university departments of education and training colleges, child-centred ideas and concepts were introduced for the first time to teachers and the public at large through the KBSR documents. As we have seen, the potential impact of these documents was probably marred by a 'crash' implementation strategy in which the objective was to produce as many 'trained' personnel as fast as possible, so that the theoretical aspects of KBSR tended to be overlooked.

Finally, it is important to note that progressivism in the United States and England evolved over time. Child-centred practices already existed, providing the grass-roots elements even before progressivism was officially endorsed. As can be concluded from the foregoing pages, the situation

is entirely different in Malaysia. We shall see in the empirical data that the implementation of KBSR is, in many instances, affected by the 'alien' nature of the child-centred concepts introduced.

CHAPTER VII

THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: AN ACCOUNT

1. RATIONALISING THE METHODS

As I have outlined in Chapter 1, the components of my research are: background analysis on child-centred education and RDD as a model of planned change, analysis of the socio-political and educational context of Malaysia, analysis of relevant curriculum documents and fieldwork in Malaysia. This chapter is an account of the methods I adopted and the processes I pursued in conducting the empirical component of my research. I should like, at the outset, to acknowledge my bias for a more 'naturalistic' mode of inquiry in educational research and a general scepticism towards the classical quantitative methods embedded in the methodology of the natural sciences which, as summed up by Robinson, 'has produced some sophisticated and elegant statistical techniques but has done little to enhance man's understanding of man' (Robinson, 1974, p. 252). Since the early 1970s there has been a steady accumulation of literature to indicate the shift in emphasis in educational research from the traditional to alternative paradigms (for example, Wolcott, 1975; Hamilton et al., 1977; Simons, 1980; Burgess, 1985). Yet the existence of this literature in itself does not absolve me from the obligation of explicating my chosen research methods. I am

only too aware that in forsaking the 'agricultural - botany' paradigm (Parlett and Hamilton, 1972), a host of questions pertaining to objectivity, validity, reliability, generalizability and so on will be levelled against my research, especially in Malaysia where very few educational researchers, to my knowledge, have departed from the traditional survey, questionnaire and structured interview techniques, and of course pre- and post-tests; in instances where classroom observations have been carried out, these tend to be of the systematic type (for example, Siti Hawa, 1986). However, there is a strong tradition of criticism of such research methods in relation to their inappropriateness for curricular inquiry (for example, Hamilton et al., 1977). Thus, without wishing to be overly defensive, I shall attempt to make the assumptions underlying my research technique explicit and also my methods for generating and interpreting data, for in the qualitative methods the 'self' is ultimately the primary research instrument.

The research that I have conducted may be located within a broadly ethnographic or interpretive tradition; case-study is perhaps a more appropriate term, since it is 'the examination of an instance in action' (MacDonald and Walker, 1977, p. 181), the instance in this case being KBSR. Wolcott (1975) has stated that 'case-study' provides a handy and unassuming label but 'ethnography' is the preferred generic term. Whatever their subtle differences,

researchers have in the main use the two terms interchangeably and it is widely acknowledged that they share similar perspectives and approaches to studying aspects of human social life.

Notwithstanding my penchant for the non-quantitative methods as stated earlier, there are indeed valid rationales for the methods that I have chosen and considered appropriate for the conduct of my research on KBSR. I do believe numerical techniques can contribute importantly to educational research, but in the final analysis, it was the research problem and the conceptual framework that determined my choice of research methods. Early in 1967 Glaser and Strauss pointed out that the researcher 'must have a perspective that will help him to see relevant data and abstract significant categories from his scrutiny of the data' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 3). By and large, ethnographers have heeded this advice; even those who claim to have engaged in 'exploratory' methods have some hunches up their sleeves.

With regard to my own study, it will be remembered that my substantive interest was a curriculum innovation which, as a response to the Cabinet Committee (1979) recommendation for 'overall development', would be premised on child-centred pedagogy and would therefore be greatly different from the prevalent traditional curriculum. A complex and

multidimensional change was expected through the implementation of KBSR, whether the authorities recognized it as such or not. When we focus on the teacher as the implementor of an innovation in the classroom, there are at least four dimensions to the change expected. These have been outlined by Fullan as:

- a) the possible use of new materials;
- b) possible changes in structure (e.g. grouping in the classroom);
- c) possible use of new teaching approaches;
- d) the possible incorporation of new and revised beliefs (e.g. philosophical pedagogical assumptions and beliefs underlying the particular approach).

(Fullan, 1983, p. 217)

I have contended that assumptions and beliefs, the fourth dimension mentioned above, in fact are the foundations for child-centred practices. Yet beliefs, assumptions, perceptions and understanding are hardly quantifiable and do not lend themselves to the normal statistical methods. I had, therefore, to resort to qualitative research techniques to resolve this very important issue of determining whether the curriculum change taking place was merely at the surface level or more fundamental.

Related to my substantive interest in KBSR was the broader theoretical issue of change and innovation itself.

In Chapter 3 I referred to the curriculum development movement of the 1960s in the United States and Britain, noting the failure of most of the supposedly teacher-proof curriculum projects to make real impact in schools. Curriculum renewal projects in Malaysia in the late 1960s and first half of 1970s, though few in number, likewise did not achieve the desired objectives - this I referred to in Chapter 5. It would appear from the history of these early projects that the greatest fallacy was to conceive of curriculum change as merely the dissemination of consumer products, whereas curriculum change is in reality a change in a social system, involving persons, roles, interrelationships, values and so on. Arising out of the lessons learnt, innovatory programmes are no longer examined in isolation. Increasingly evaluators, and educational researchers generally, study curriculum innovations holistically, examining their rationale, evolutions, operations, difficulties and so on in their social context and learning milieu, seeking for the truths in 'authentic situations' (Simons, 1971). It is important to take into consideration the views of the participants involved in the process of curriculum change. Thus Shipman has well documented the way the various agents involved in the Keele Integrated Studies Project defined their part in it, with contrasting definitions and interpretations of the curriculum project (Shipman, 1974). Likewise Smith and Keith have pointed out individual staff conceptions, that

'the school was many and sometimes different things to individual faculty members.....particular elements were abstracted and focused on by particular staff members' (Smith and Keith, 1971, p. 22).

In embarking upon this research, then, the major question I posed myself was whether KBSR had really brought about a fundamental change in the Malaysian primary curriculum as its planners intended. And, sensing that there were far too many obstacles or barriers for a smooth transfer from the traditional curriculum to a 'curriculum for overall development', a concomitant question was to find out the nature of the difficulties involved in the design and implementation of this innovation. These were not questions which could be satisfactorily answered by statistical measures and quantitative methods. At issue were the opinions, understandings, perceptions and interpretations of all the actors involved in the change process, though of course it cannot be denied that other contextual factors, such as the facilities provided, also play their part in the successful implementation of any innovation. On balance, I decided that the appropriate steps towards seeking the KBSR 'truths' was to employ the qualitative methods of unstructured interview and observation. The former, I felt, had the potential ability to elicit personal views, attitudes, perceptions, understanding and interpretations and, in addition, may possibly open up new dimensions of a

problem. I felt that observations would enable me to collect detailed data on verbal as well as non-verbal behaviour and in natural settings; only through observations could the salient features and subjective elements of teaching be revealed. Besides, since my observation was to be carried out over an extended period of time, it would create an informal relationship with the teachers observed, resulting in a greater 'naturalness' of the data collected.

While I do not presume that the citing of other case studies will increase the credibility or validity of my own research, it is nevertheless noteworthy that several past studies related to open or progressive education - and therefore akin to my research on KBSR in that they examined child-centred beliefs and practices in one way or another - have also employed unstructured or loosely structured interviewing and observations as the mainstays of their investigations. Among these are Smith and Keith (1971), Sharp and Green (1975) and Sussmann (1977), all of which located their fieldwork in elementary or primary schools.

2. GAINING ACCESS

It is probably a truism that schools everywhere are closed systems and sponsorship is required for entry. In Malaysia there is a standard procedure for this. I first wrote to the Director, Educational Planning and Research Division

(EPRD) of the Ministry of Education in mid-December 1985, seeking for permission to do a research on KBSR. I specified that the research would involve interviewing several education personnel as well as observation in two classrooms, apart from examining relevant documents. The response I received in mid-January 1986 was a request that I submitted the following items in order that my application to conduct the research could be processed:

- a) three copies of Research Application Form BPPPI, duly filled;
- b) three copies of Research Application Form BPPP II, duly filled;
- c) a copy of the Research Proposal that had been approved by the University;
- d) two copies of the questionnaire, interview questions or testing formats; and
- e) permission from the relevant authorities or departments where I would get the 'samples' for my study.

While I was in a position to comply with the first four requests immediately, clearly the fifth item was of a more exacting nature. I had expected the EPRD to give the green light and armed with it I would go ^{to} the various divisions and

departments to carry out my research. Instead, it turned out that the EPRD would give the 'go ahead' only after prior permission had been obtained from the latter agencies. As I had planned to begin my fieldwork during the second week of February, I spent the rest of January 1986 feverishly contacting the various authorities. Specifically, I wrote formal letters seeking for permission to interview some officers and/or to observe teaching in classrooms. Such letters were sent to the following authorities, but each was slightly different from the other, as I had to explain the exact nature of the cooperation I was seeking:

- a) The Director, Curriculum Development Centre;
- b) The Director, Teacher Education Division;
- c) The Chief Inspector, Federal Inspectorate of Schools;
- d) The State Director of Education, Selangor;
- e) The Director of Education, Federal Territory; and
- f) The District Education Officer, Petaling Jaya.

Bureaucracy indeed causes one to procrastinate. I was back in Malaysia by the second week of February 1986, and was able to give my earlier letters a 'push' - in cases where they had not been answered yet - by telephoning or meeting the officers in charge personally. It was of no small advantage that I knew some of them personally, having been colleagues at the university during our undergraduate days. Nevertheless it was not until early March 1986 that I

finally managed to fulfil all the requirements of the EPRD with regard to research, and I duly submitted all the required items personally. I felt that the personal touch was very important to speed things up. Without it my application for permission to do research could very well have meandered here and there. The overall permission to conduct my research was granted three days later, with the officer in charge assuring me that EPRD welcomed all kinds of educational research and reminding me that a copy of my thesis was to be submitted to the Division as soon as it was ready.

3. SAMPLING

KBSR, as I have described in the previous chapter, is based somewhat on the RDD model of planned change and disseminated from the centre to the periphery. As such, it was appropriate that I sought for the views of the participants involved in the change right from the centre to the periphery. Essentially this meant getting representatives from the national level, the state level, the district level and the school level, that is from the highest to the lowest levels of the organizational hierarchy.

At the national level there are several divisions of the Ministry of Education (see Fig. 2). Clearly some form of sampling was necessary here. I opted to interview personnel only from the Curriculum Development Centre, the Teacher

Education Division and the Inspectorate, as I considered these Divisions to be the ones most directly involved with KBSR. So I wrote to the Heads of these Divisions, requesting for permission to interview three or four of their officers who were involved in the planning and/or implementation and monitoring of KBSR. I was, in other words, selecting key informants to be interviewed based on 'theoretical sampling' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), in that the viewpoints of these personnel were especially noteworthy because of their positions and responsibilities.

At the state level I chose the state of Selangor for reason of feasibility. Given the limited time I had to conduct my fieldwork, it would have been impractical to interview officers in states other than the one in which I lived - I had to avoid travelling to distant offices. To the Education Director of the state of Selangor, my request was similar to those I made at the national level - to interview three or four of his key informants. The Federal Territory I selected again on practical grounds, because of its close proximity. It was in fact at one time part of the state of Selangor. Currently it is an administrative unit on par with the state of Selangor, yet unlike the states it does not have districts under its jurisdiction; it deals directly with the schools. To the Education Director of the Federal Territory, I therefore wrote for permission to interview three or four of his officers and Key Personnel

(KPs), to observe a classroom with a 'good' teacher implementing KBSR for approximately a month and to interview the classroom teacher and headteacher of the school in which the classroom was located. At the district level I made similar requests to the District Education Officer. The district of Petaling Jaya was chosen again because of its close proximity and easy access to me. Thus it would be fair to say that my research locations were selected more or less on the basis of convenience.

The total number of personnel I actually interviewed far exceeded the number I originally planned for. My original intention, as stated above, was to interview three or four officers from each division or department, apart from the two headteachers and the two teachers of the classrooms observed. A total of slightly above twenty would have been sufficient, I felt, bearing in mind the nature of the interview and the limited time for my fieldwork, approximately a four-month duration for both the interviewing and observation plus gathering documents. However, some of the authorities which kindly assented to my request furnished me with several names, each officer being assigned to specific areas of the curriculum. The Federal Inspectorate of Schools, for instance, submitted the names of six officers, each responsible for a particular area or subject, as follows:

- Bahasa Malaysia
- Mathematics
- Man and His Environment
- Moral Education
- Art Education
- Remedial Education

I felt it was important to get the opinion and perception of each one of them, so I decided to interview all of them. Likewise at the district level there were Key Personnel (KPs) for every subject found in KBSR, namely:

- Bahasa Malaysia
- English
- Mathematics
- Man and His Environment
- Islamic Religious Education
- Moral Education
- Art Education
- Physical Education
- Music

Again I decided it was important to interview at least one KP for each subject. A clearer picture of the interviewees is depicted in Table 5.

With regard to the classroom observations I carried out, it may be pertinent to ask why I chose only two classrooms,

Table 5: Education Personnel Interviewed

ORGANIZATION	PERSONNEL/ DESIGNATION	RESPONSIBILITY	NUMBER INTER- VIEWED
Curriculum Development Centre	Curriculum Officers	Develop curriculum (KBSR) and monitor implementations	4
The Inspectorate	Inspectors of Schools	Monitor implementation and provide guidance to headteachers and teachers	6
Teacher Education Division	Assistant Directors/ Lecturers	Design, implement and evaluate curricula in Teacher Training Colleges; train pre-service teachers	5
State Education Department, Selangor	Assistant Director and KBSR Supervisors	Responsible for all aspects of implementation at state level: coordinating, budgeting, training, supervision, evaluation, etc.	3
Education Department, Federal Territory	Assistant Director and KBSR Coordinators	Responsible for all aspects of implementation in the Federal Territory	3
District Education Office	District Education Officer and KBSR Coordinators	Responsible for all aspects of implementation in the district.	3
Education Office/ Schools	Key Personnel (Selected primary School Teachers)	Spend 3 days in their own schools and 2 days at the Education Office or visiting other teachers	11
Schools	Headteachers	Supervision of implementation in school	2
	Teachers	Implement KBSR in classrooms	2
Total =			39

two 'good' teachers, and over an extended period of time. Why not cover many classrooms and teachers during the same period? The time constraint naturally prevented me from observing many classrooms. More importantly, however, was the nature of the problem that I wanted to investigate. As I have indicated earlier, my interest in conducting classroom observations was to see for myself how KBSR was implemented in real-life situations, to collect detailed data of on-going behaviour within the complexity of the classroom, noting the teacher's concerns, interests, classroom practices, the availability of materials, the organizational constraints the teacher had to cope with and so on, hopefully to understand the KBSR teacher's 'life in classroom' (Jackson, 1968). All these 'naturalness' could be revealed to the observer only over a period of weeks or months. With the limited time resources that I had, I decided that observing two classrooms was all that was feasible for me.

The stipulation that the two classrooms I observed be taught by 'good' KBSR teachers must also be explained. I left it to the respective authorities to select what they considered to be good KBSR teachers. I had two reasons for wanting to ensure that the classrooms I observed be in the care of good teachers. First, in the event that the KBSR implementation I observed were ineffective, faulty or deficient, it could not be summarily dismissed as the result

of poor teachers and therefore poor teaching. Secondly, I knew that only 'good' teachers, and by implication those self-assured and confident of the 'rightness' of their teaching, would agree to be observed for an extended period. To my knowledge never before had Malaysian teachers been observed day in and day out as I was planning to do. Their experience of being observed was limited to short visits by their supervisors during their teaching practice or occasional visits by the KPs and rarely visits by members of the Inspectorate or other officials. I was, therefore, counting on a great deal of cooperation which I felt only good teachers would be able to offer.

All in all, I think my sampling technique can be fairly summarised as theoretical and pragmatic.

4. DATA COLLECTION AND RECORDING

As is customary in the study of innovations, the preliminary stage of data collection was the gathering of background information pertaining to KBSR. This was indeed necessary, considering that innovations do not appear overnight or unheralded, especially one on a large scale and affecting the whole nation such as KBSR. Thus I spent quite some time frequenting the CDC and EPRD libraries, gathering relevant documents and records, whether published or unpublished. Policy statements made by the Minister of Education, seminar papers presented by high-level education officers,

periodicals and newsletters of the various divisions of the Ministry, and newspaper reports also provided a wealth of information. It will be noticed from the previous chapters that such documents in one way or another have contributed to my line of inquiry.

I shall describe in some detail here the conduct of my interviews as the interview data have contributed substantially to my research. Soon after the various authorities had assented to my request to interview their officers and given me their names, I contacted them individually by phone or met them personally to discuss a suitable date, time and place for the interviews. I made sure that the interviews would be held at their convenience. As it turned out, the first interviewees were officers from the Inspectorate of Schools whom, had I not taken the opportunity to interview them at that particular period, would have been extremely difficult to get later as they were scheduled to go out for inspection in other states.

At each interview I followed a certain procedure. First of all I explained the reasons for wanting to interview him/her - that I was a research student interested in curriculum innovation; that KBSR provided an appropriate Malaysian example for case study; and that since he/she was directly involved in the planning and/or implementation of KBSR, I was sure he/she could enlighten me a great deal on

what KBSR was about. Being acutely conscious that I was in a sense 'sponsored' by their superiors, I was at pains to assure them that the interviews were informal, the information confidential and that their anonymity would be ensured. None of them challenged me over this. Those who did question me were more interested in my academic background and the reasons for doing the research.

Next I asked them to fill in a brief questionnaire on their background (see Appendix 3). A note must be made of the languages used. During the interviews I gave the interviewees the option of speaking in either English or Bahasa Malaysia, 'whichever language you are more comfortable with'. A few of the officers spoke in English entirely, resorting to Bahasa Malaysia only for certain technical terms used in the KBSR documents. Most of them spoke in both languages, a blend of English and Bahasa Malaysia, as is often the case during conversations among English-educated Malaysians. A few spoke mainly in Bahasa Malaysia, with smatterings of English words or phrases here and there - the KPs, notably, fell into this group. In this thesis I have translated the Bahasa Malaysia conversations into English, attempting to stick to the original version as far as possible.

Consistent with the substantive and theoretical framework of my investigation, the kind of interviewing I favoured was the unstructured or open-ended interview. The

interviews were unstructured in the sense that they were more like conversations and there was flexibility. At the same time they were not altogether non-directive as I had an 'agenda' of topics to be covered. Generally the primary purpose of the interviews with the various personnel was to elicit their perceptions and understanding of KBSR - that was the overall guide. But variations existed, depending on the designations and responsibilities of the interviewees. For example, questions posed to the officers of the CDC included seeking information on the planning phase of KBSR, while with the personnel at the district and school levels, the problems of implementation assumed greater significance. The topics or agenda covered during the interviews are shown in Appendix 4. It was gratifying that most of the interviewees talked freely and I resorted to my agenda or probed accordingly only when necessary. Once conversation had started, the questions I asked, in the main, followed up what the interviewees said.

I tape-recorded all the interviews, with the interviewees' prior permission. At the same time I also took brief notes or made quick summaries of what they said during the conversations. I should like to mention that the interviews with the two teachers were conducted after my one-month observation period in their respective classrooms. I had two reasons for this deliberate design. First, it was in order that I could seek for clarification over certain

points or activities carried out in the classroom during the observation period. Secondly, I did not want the conversation during the interviews to influence the teachers' actions in their classrooms, as could have happened if the interviews preceded the observations, in which case the 'naturalness' of the classroom situation would at times have been questionable. On reflection, I can now add a third reason, one which perhaps further validated my interview data with the teachers: at the end of the period of observation the teachers and I had become friends; this enabled us to have a candid, 'open' conversation during the interviews.

Observation. I must admit that my past experiences of observing in classrooms had been connected with evaluating teacher trainees. As I was embarking on an observation of a totally different kind, I decided to 'pilot' it first. For this purpose a close friend who is a primary school teacher agreed that I observe in her classroom, Year III of KBSR, for a week. Only after this experience did I begin to do my observation in Classroom A, followed by observation in Classroom B about a month later. Even so, in both classrooms I did not take any notes for the first few days. This was to allow the teachers and their pupils to get used to my presence at the back of the classroom. I also assured the two teachers that my presence in their classrooms was not in any way connected with evaluating them, that I was

only interested to see how KBSR was implemented. Perhaps I should also mention here that in the second school, on my first visit to meet the Headteacher and the teacher whom she had earlier nominated to be observed, this teacher refused to be observed. I was glad that the Headteacher did not insist on her agreeing to be observed. Instead, she called another 'good teacher' who willingly agreed to be observed, but she told me since I wanted to observe her for a long period she could not possibly put on 'good performance' as for those who came for short visits. I told her that was precisely what I wanted to see - her ordinary, daily teaching, and it would be to my advantage if she could ignore my presence in her classroom totally. As for the teacher who refused to be observed, the Headteacher later told me that she used to be a very good teacher but lately seemed to have become a nervous person because of some 'family' problems.

King (1978) noted that children in infants' classrooms defined any adult as another teacher. This proved to be my experience too, initially, in Classroom A where the children were generally friendly. They greeted me with 'Good afternoon Teacher' and tried to get my attention for their work. But as time passed and I did not respond to them as their teachers normally did, they began to refer to me as 'Auntie' - a polite term used for a female adult around my age by Malaysian children. For example, on the

fifth day of my visit to the classroom one of the girls said: 'Ah, Auntie is here again today'.

During observations in the classrooms I tried my best to be inconspicuous and to maintain a non-participant role, but it was not easy to be completely detached when observing from the rear of a classroom. Sometimes the teachers directed comments especially to me, and there were occasions when they came to the back of the class to engage me in conversations. Such experiences have been encountered by other researchers as well (for example, Hammersley, 1984). One can only avoid such an occurrence, I suppose, by employing tactics as did 'The Man in the Wendy House' (King, 1984). Nevertheless, my unstructured observations resulted in a great deal of detailed fieldnotes. I took copious notes at first but later concentrated more on what seemed to be significant in relation to the child-centred practices of KBSR. For example, I noted down the individualized and group activities carried out, the rewards and punishment meted out, and whether creativity was encouraged. For each day of the observations I was mindful of the date and time events took place, and noted these down accordingly. In cases where subjects were taught by specialist teachers, such as Music and Islamic Religious Education, the two classroom teachers negotiated on my behalf so that I was able to observe some of these lessons.

Beside observing in the classrooms, I was a participant observer as I attended the weekly school assembly, went to the playing fields with the teachers, and joined the teachers in staffroom and canteen conversations. In one of the schools I even attended a grand dinner organized by the Parent-Teacher Association to raise funds. On this occasion, where the Minister of Education was the guest of honour, I met and spoke with several prominent parents and learned a bit more about the culture of the school. Thus at the end of the observation periods I had accumulated fieldnotes not only of classroom observations but also informal conversations with the two teachers, staffroom and canteen 'talk' and other events.

5. ANALYSIS OF DATA

The first stage of analysis was to transcribe all the interview tapes. This proved to be very time-consuming as I had interviewed thirty-nine personnel, and on average each one of them spoke for about forty minutes. There was also the problem of audibility: three interviews took place in an office where the building was undergoing refurbishment; two interviews were in an 'open-plan' office with conversations and the clatter of typewriters around; another two were held in a closed room in which, I realized later, a rotating wall fan, ~~I realized later,~~ had blown away the sound of the conversations at regular intervals. In these circumstances,

the notes that I took down during the interviews were of great help. On the whole, the interviews had provided me with rich and detailed data.

After the transcriptions were completed, I read through them and initially thought that all the information was important. I wrote pages and pages on these, presenting the interview data according to groups such as the planners, inspectors, teacher educators, and so on. In presenting the data that way, there was too much repetition and too little analysis or comments. Months later I reorganized the interview data and analysed them according to KBSR concepts and classroom practices as perceived by personnel at the centre, midway and periphery. This is the version that I have presented in Chapter VIII of this thesis. Essentially what I did was to extract and present some of the data that illustrate my arguments concerning KBSR - a criterion of relevance, so to speak.

In some respects, analysis of the observational data took place even while I was carrying out the observation. As I recorded events in my fieldnotes, I was at the same time making some preliminary interpretations. This was especially so during the later stages of classroom observations, when events had become more predictable. Along the margin of my fieldnotes I wrote, in red ink, words such as 'remedial work', 'enrichment', 'classroom control', 'free expression', 'learning through play', 'punishment',

'peer cooperation' and so on. Later when observations had been completed I read through all my fieldnotes several times and noted down similar incidents that could be classified under one broad category, for example, 'misbehaviour and punishment'. It was from these collated materials that I extracted from the fieldnotes incidents and situations to illustrate particular points concerning classroom practices, classroom climate and so on as presented in Chapter IX, in which a further clarification of the analytical method is provided.

6. SOME REFLECTIONS

It is now more than a year since I conducted my field research, employing an approach which was predicated on my personal involvement as a researcher, and therefore raises the question of subjectivity. The emergent ethnographic or case study literature invariably advises the researcher to make explicit his/her 'theoretical principles and methodological ground rules' (Parlett and Hamilton, 1972), to ensure that the researcher's own actions are open to analysis (Hammerslery, 1983), to present the means of data collection so that the reader could judge for him/herself 'the relationship between assertion and evidence' (Adelman et al., 1980), and to include a wealth of primary data in the account presented (Wolcott, 1975). I have attempted to follow all these ground rules by detailing my research

methodology in the foregoing pages and in citing the data very extensively in the interview and observation chapters. But I still have lingering doubts and I feel the need for greater reflexivity.

First, I am not absolutely sure of the 'naturalness' of my research. Even though the teachers I observed said their actions were not affected by my presence in their classrooms, there must have been times when my presence did influence them. I wonder, for example, if Mrs. Basir (see Chapter IX) would have sent some of her 'naughty' children out of the class, rather than merely threaten them, if I were not there. Then there was the officer with whom I managed to secure an interview out of sheer persistence on my part. Did I notice some guardedness on his part during the interview, or was it my imagination?

I am also troubled by the ethics of doing case study research. Some of the information I gained was potentially damaging to the good name of the interviewee or the institution. Fortunately such information was not essential for the purpose of supporting my arguments. Nevertheless it was 'guilty knowledge' which I secured unintentionally. I wonder, too, whether anonymising my informants is a sufficient cover for their identity.

I should also mention that, in writing out this thesis, initially I found it extremely difficult to be assertive or

to state my claims and contentions boldly. Coming from an eastern culture in which humility is a virtue, it was no small effort on my part to begin writing in the first person singular. I am only too ^aware that many Malaysian readers would consider my style egoistic and pretentious. Yet this is presently the norm in the western tradition of curriculum inquiry literature and educational research generally. In a sense, I am caught between contrasting values. I have opted for an 'alien' style of writing. Am I not, therefore, one of the symptoms of cultural imperialism?

Finally, I must reiterate that the methods I chose for the conduct of my research, despite some misgivings, were the ones I considered most appropriate to get at the KBSR 'truths'. A quantitative approach would not have yielded the rich, varied and detailed data that I did gain, and which made possible a greater understanding of the Malaysian primary curriculum change.

CHAPTER VIII

THE INTERVIEWS

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the data collected from interviews with thirty nine education personnel, ranging from curriculum planners to classroom teachers. As expected, the unstructured interviews have provided me with rich, varied and detailed data. However, my analysis will focus mainly on issues that I have raised in previous chapters. Let me recapitulate the points that I have made so far. I have established that KBSR, as evidenced by its basic documents, has been designed to be a child-centred curriculum (Chapter 6). As such, the curriculum change expected is a fundamental change, involving not only classroom practices but also the philosophical-pedagogical assumptions underlying these practices (Chapters 1, 2 and 6). But the conditions in Malaysia do not seem to be conducive for such a change (Chapters 3, 4 and 5). In addition, initial public response to the proposed new curriculum and the early stages of KBSR implementation would seem to indicate the real possibility of a dichotomy between KBSR as planned and as it would be implemented (Chapter 6). My task here, therefore, is to use the interview data to verify whether such a dichotomy does indeed exist.

Towards this end, it is important that I examine the understanding and perception of the various actors involved in the curriculum change - their understanding and perception of the conceptual apparatuses of KBSR and their implications for classroom practices. I shall also look at the problems of implementation as anticipated by the planners and as actually encountered by the implementors. Other data gained through the interviews will be analysed if they serve to illuminate further the issues discussed.

It will be remembered that education in Malaysia is organized in a hierarchical structure and that the favoured model of change is top-down or from the centre to the periphery (Chapters 4 and 5). Bearing this in mind, my analysis will examine whether views of KBSR essentially remain the same or whether there are substantial differences as the implementation of KBSR is carried out from the centre to the periphery: of special interest here, in effect, is whether the implantation of child-centredness within KBSR - as I have demonstrated in Chapter 6- is understood by the various actors in the ^{change} process. Consequently in analysing the interview data, it is useful that I classify the interviewees broadly in the following manner, based on their positions in the implementation of KBSR:

a) The centre: Placed here are the planners,
(15 interviewees) inspectors and teacher educators,

Though the views expressed by interviewees within a group are not necessarily similar, by constructing this classification it will be possible to see broadly how KBSR has been interpreted as its 'message' is disseminated from the centre to the periphery.

2. KBSR CONCEPTS AND CLASSROOM PRACTICES

In the previous chapter I have considered various aspects of KBSR and concluded that it is indeed a curriculum that attempts to introduce a form of child-centred education into Malaysian primary schools. In this section I shall draw upon the interview data to see whether the various actors in this curriculum change perceive and understand KBSR as such and are therefore able to relate its recommended classroom practices to child-centred concepts and rationale.

2.1 Perception and Understanding at the Centre

Let me consider, first of all, the philosophy of KBSR. On the whole, it can be said that personnel at the centre perceive and understand 'overall development' as the underlying philosophy of KBSR. It was rare, however, for the interviewees to make a reference to the KBSR philosophy except when asked. They talked at length about other aspects of KBSR such as the objectives to be achieved, the teaching-learning strategies and so on but not its

philosophy, perhaps because philosophy is something abstract, though the Blue Book- as indicated earlier (Chapter 6) devotes a section to the child-centred philosophy of primary education. When a reference was voluntarily made of the philosophy of KBSR, very often it was influenced by the interviewee's own area of specialization. The inspector who has a Master's degree in Early Childhood Education, for instance, had this to say regarding the philosophy of KBSR:

To develop each child according to his needs - that's the philosophy of early childhood education. Individual needs-that is the most important. Rather than teaching one big group, one kind of curriculum.

(Interview Conversation in English, 7.4.86)

The inspector whose specialised subject area is Art Education gave the following interpretation of the KBSR philosophy:

The general concept of KBSR is to give an overall education, so that all the children's faculties would be utilised eventually....A child may be very knowledgeable academically, but then what about other aspects of life? I would go for total development. In the old curriculum academic stress was the thing, now there's a terrific difference...The concept of overall development - that's the first thing, the crux of the matter...

(Interview Conversation in English, 18.3.86)

There seems to be a concurrence among the planners in their conception of 'overall development' and 'balanced education' as the underlying philosophy of KBSR when I posed the question, 'What would you say is the philosophy of

KBSR ?' In addition, the data also indicate the planners' concern for learning and the 3Rs, so much so that these form part of their perception of the philosophy of KBSR. I cite below the responses of two planners regarding the KBSR philosophy:

To give children an overall and balanced education, to encourage the development of children's potential, and to reinforce the 3Rs....

(Interview Conversation translated, 3.6.86)

It is the overall development of the pupil..the balanced child, a child who is academically inclined, a good learner yet balanced in other aspects, the co-curricular side - a healthy, wholesome, rounded child...You don't have to learn too much but you are an efficient learner, a good mixer, can control and plan your time, make decisions.... a modern child! It may sound westernised. But well, if it is good in a westernised form why should we deny that it is ...

(Interview Conversation in English, 19.5.86)

In the above interview data, while the child-centred philosophy of overall development and balanced education is perceived as important, the 3Rs and efficient learning are viewed as equally important. It is also significant that the 'wholesome', 'rounded' and 'modern' child is acknowledged as a 'western' concept, but one which is 'good' for Malaysia as well.

The five teacher educators interviewed generally gave overall and balanced development as the philosophy of KBSR. Like the planners, their concern for the basic skills was apparent as well, as can be seen from the following interview data:

KBSR is based on the philosophy of the overall and balanced development of the individual. Towards this end, the Ministry of Education has planned KBSR based on the rationale that the primary school curriculum should be built upon basic skills...Aside from mastery of the basic skills, the ultimate objective is that after six years of primary schooling children would have achieved overall development, a development which is balanced physically, intellectually, socially and so on...

(Interview Conversation translated, 24.3.86)

KBSR encourages children to cooperate, that's one of the underlying philosophy. Pupils should be encouraged to interact, cooperate, communicate. The first three years, the receptive level, is necessary for that... The 3Rs is just the cangkul [a Malay word referring to an implement somewhat like the hoe] to plant something...

(Interview Conversation partially translated, 14.3.86)

In order to gain an insight into the interviewees' perception and understanding of KBSR, I asked them: 'What do you see as the major changes in KBSR that distinguished it from the old primary curriculum?' By and large, the planners, inspectors and teacher educators interviewed seem to concur that emphasis on the acquisition of basic skills is a major change in KBSR. There are, however, shades of variation in their perception as to whether this is the most important change. Let me illustrate by citing the interview data. Responding to my question, one of the planners said that, aside from mastery of the 3Rs, other changes are:

..... the role of the teachers - that is one thing new. They are supposed to allow a lot of participation and involvement by the children. [Another change is] the role of the headmaster - headmasters tended to be bias towards administrative work, now we want them to be more professional. Other changes are the subject we bring in under KBSR. And the evaluation system - that's new because we don't leave it to the end. We don't want the child's weakness to accumulate - when that happens, that

is going back to the old curriculum. That is why in the Blue Book we say remediation and enrichment are part and parcel of the whole teaching [process]. Evaluation should be continuous.

(Interview Conversation in English, 27.3.86)

All the inspectors interviewed perceive the emphasis on the acquisition of basic skills as a major difference between the old curriculum and KBSR. In addition, their personal understanding of KBSR seems to lead each one of them to single out different aspects of it as a further characteristic that distinguishes it from the old curriculum. The following aspects were mentioned:

- group teaching as a method
- less number of subjects in KBSR
- academic learning begins in Year 4
- there is a recreational component
- it stresses the integration of subjects.

Let me illustrate by citing two responses from the interview data with the inspectors:

In the case of the old curriculum pupils started from Standard 1 itself to learn cognitive subjects like Science, Geography....taught to them from the word 'go'. Now for the first three years only the 3Rs [are taught]. It's only in Phase II that these subjects are taught. So academic learning begins in Year 4... This is the main line of distinction between the two [the old and the new curriculum], basically.

(Interview Conversation in English, 20.3.86)

In KBSR subjects are integrated, no longer compartmentalised; learning is continuous from subject to subject. Teachers are told it is appropriate to do so - don't worry too much about the timetable.. There should

not be a permanent wall between one time and another.... In the old curriculum, teachers talked of 'the five important subjects'... there's no such thing as one subject being more important than another...
(Interview Conversation in English, 18.3.86)

The teacher educators interviewed do not seem to see 'emphasis on the 3Rs' as superseding other concerns in the new curriculum. One of them distinguishes the old curriculum from the new in the following manner:

The old curriculum gave more attention to exam - passing exams was the ultimate objective...too much knowledge and did not take into consideration children who could not acquire the knowledge, they were somewhat put aside. In the new curriculum content is not so important. Teach them the skills so that they can acquire on their own the content part of it. We should be encouraging children to read and enrich themselves... KBSR should instil interest in the children.

(Interview Conversation in English, 8.5.86)

The message that can be gleaned from the above is that teaching the basic skills is important only in so far as they are necessary for the acquisition of knowledge. Equally important is the instilling of interest in children. This view of the basic skills as the foundation for further knowledge is supported by another teacher educator who says that the question of whether there is more or less content in KBSR - as some quarters claim that children are now learning less than before - does not arise at all. 'In the old curriculum teachers gave a lot of content without caring whether the children were able to cope with it or not. Now in KBSR, once the children have mastered the basic skills they can acquire the knowledge content on their own not only

within the classroom but also from other sources outside the classroom' (Interview Conversation translated, 24.3.86). The teacher educator adds that in the second phase of KBSR not only is the acquisition of knowledge stressed but also the acquisition of 'higher order skills' such as carrying out observation, research and analysis through the introduction of the new subject Man and His Environment.

That the 3Rs is not the overriding concern of the new curriculum is further elaborated by another teacher educator who perceives three other factors as equally important, namely (a) the integration of subjects, (b) the Moral Education component and (c) aesthetic values. In his own words:

Our old curriculum was too compartmentalised, while children do not see things as existing in compartments. So, besides the emphasis on the 3Rs, we introduce subjects globally through Man and His Environment, in which components of History, Geography, Economics and Anthropology are integrated. In addition, it has been realized that the formation of the child's character should also be emphasized, so there are subjects like Religious Education and Moral Education to instil values while the children are still young.....Aesthetic values are also emphasized, through the subjects 'Music and Movement' and Art Education.
(Interview Conversation partially translated, 17.3.86)

KBSR, as we have seen earlier (Chapter 6), recommends certain teaching-learning strategies and classroom organization and management consistent with its child-centred philosophy, but these are suggestions to be used at the individual teacher's discretion. However, the interview

data indicate that even personnel at the centre tend to overlook this element of flexibility withⁱⁿ KBSR. Thus one of the inspectors interviewed had this to say of teaching aids:

Under the new curriculum, a lot of use is made of teaching aids....maximum use of teaching aids if you want to create impact and expect effective learning [to take place]. It's an essential component of KBSR, it's imperative to use teaching aids...I think apart from making lessons interesting, it creates better impact on the minds of the pupils, because it's something visual...to concretise, as it were. Illustrations, I think, are necessary to leave an imprint in the minds of pupils...I usually stress this when I go for inspection. I find that this has been overlooked. Teachers are able to achieve the objective of teaching KBSR given the willingness and commitment to teach as prescribed or recommended....Like I said, teaching aid is an integral part of KBSR.

(Interview Conversation in English, 20.3.86)

By his definition, a teacher who does not prepare teaching aids cannot teach any subject in KBSR. In contrast to this dogmatism, the teacher educators interviewed were generally able to relate teaching methods to the rationale behind them; for example, group teaching, said one of them, has been advocated in order to cater for different abilities in children. It is also obvious that they themselves subscribed to the notion of child-centredness and had a greater understanding of the child-centred ideology of KBSR, as is evidenced by the following interview data:

The teaching strategy is important in KBSR. In the old curriculum we used the structural method [in teaching English]. In KBSR we are activity-oriented. The lesson revolves around a certain activity, using a certain function. For example, to greet a person - what are the

structures, vocabulary and activities that can be used ...KBSR is activity-oriented and pupil-oriented, the teacher acts as facilitator.

(Interview Conversation in English, 14.3.86; emphasis mine)

The previous system [the old curriculum] was more teacher-dominated. Now the focus is the child, the teacher merely playing the role of facilitator... we are advocating things like group work and all that, whereby you are considering students of different abilities. We are also resource-oriented rather than teacher-oriented

(Interview Conversation in English, 8.5.86; emphasis mine)

The approach [of the new curriculum] of course is very different, because it is really child-centred, activity-based teaching...Pupils are more interested and the whole learning process becomes enjoyable to them, rather than teachers teaching them all the time without having pupils taking part....Individual differences in children are better taken care of because it is recommended that teachers adopt group teaching.

(Interview Conversation in English, 17.3.86; emphasis mine)

A great deal of controversy has arisen over the question of group teaching, with teachers often complaining that it is difficult to teach in groups when they have fifty children in their classrooms. One of the planners interviewed, however, explained that grouping is not compulsory in KBSR, adding:

That's the trouble...people think KBSR is group work. It may be, it has to be so in the early stages. But when a teacher is not comfortable with group teaching and is better off as an orator in front of a group of fifty and the children are learning...that's it, because methodology is not KBSR, KBSR is the essence...

(Interview Conversation in English, 19.5.86)

According to this planner, the misunderstanding over grouping arose partly because the CDC had shown a videotape

to KPs (who later trained the teachers), in which a language lesson started off with class instruction followed by group work. It was meant to be an example, but it became a standard practice as KPs informed teachers that group teaching was the appropriate KBSR teaching method. At the other extreme, however, there are those who favour the traditional whole-class teaching method for 'effective' and 'economic' reasons at the expense of an awareness of children's different abilities. Consider the following preference expressed by one of the teacher educators interviewed:

Although group teaching is recommended, I feel if there's a need then only you do it...say what you like, but class teaching still has its place. For certain things it may be the most effective and the most economic, so why not use it.

(Interview Conversation in English, 17.3.86)

Since the introduction of KBSR streaming, a practice prevalent during earlier years, has been discouraged - at least that was the position taken initially. But this practice was so entrenched in Malaysian schools that several schools continued with it. Seeing that this practice did not adversely affect the performance of KBSR children, the CDC relaxed its position on non-streaming. The advice given to schools that wished to stream their classes was to ensure that there would be mobility from one stream to another (Interview Conversation with planners on 19.5.86). There are, however, personnel at the centre who validate streaming

on other than educational grounds. One of the inspectors interviewed conceives of streaming according to ability as a 'good' practice because it reduces the range of ability. In an unstreamed classroom, he maintains, the teacher can give only one third of his attention to Groups A, B and C respectively, whereas in a streamed classroom he can devote all his time to the whole class. 'They try to make the most efficient use of their resources', he says. Thus streaming in this case is rationalised and legitimised by offering an economic reason - one which is antithetical to the idea of child-centredness, I believe.

The new evaluation system introduced under KBSR, which departs from the old practice of testing and standardised examination, does not seem to be fully appreciated or understood by a couple of personnel at the centre. Rationales for formative and continuous evaluation, the development of individual potential, and so on seem to be rejected by the inspector who favours standardised examinations as he says:

No country can ever give exams individually. As long as there is public education there will be standardised exams. Maybe they will have more questions to cover the range... but somehow or other there will be some kind of norm at the end of the six years.

(Interview Conversation in English, 7.4.86)

The interview data also indicate that there is a lack of comprehension among some of the 'centre' personnel regarding the concepts of integration and overall development. In one instance, an inspector expressed the fear that KBSR might revert to the old curriculum, saying : 'From time to time the load in KBSR seems to be increased. We wanted to decrease the number of subjects before...' (Interview Conversation partially translated, 26.8.86). This comment was made with reference to the Ministry's plans to introduce Commercial Practices and Manipulative Skills, to be integrated into the subjects Mathematics and Art Education respectively. If the inspector had fully comprehended the significance of subject integration, he would not have come up with the notion that the number of subjects was being increased.

Another instance of misunderstanding can be deduced from the following interview conversation with an inspector:

Researcher: There is a mention of 'overall development' in KBSR. What is your view regarding this?

Inspector: Overall development means in all areas, all knowledge, comprehensive and not a specific specialisation.... Before we had Geography, History, Science, but now in KBSR we

have Man and His Environment. This subject encompasses all areas - Science, Geography and History...

(Interview Conversation translated, 21.3.86)

It is clear from the above data that the concept of overall development of the individual has been misunderstood, possibly confused with the concept of integration of subjects, as both are new concepts as far as Malaysian schooling is concerned.

The programme of remediation and enrichment, which forms an integral part of KBSR, has given rise to a great deal of controversy even among 'centre' personnel. Despite the intention of KBSR to provide for both the fast and the slow learners, some perceive that above-average pupils are at a disadvantage. As elaborated by an inspector,

In KBSR for the faster children we give enrichment and for the slower children remedial work. So that is the theory. In practice it is difficult [to carry out], very demanding on the teachers. The teacher has to prepare both enrichment and remedial work... In the schools we encourage horizontal rather than vertical enrichment, because if we teach the faster children more, the other children will be left far behind... In a classroom situation it will be a problem if some are far ahead and others are very slow. When it comes to examinations, they have to cover the same number of units... I think our Ministry pays more attention to the majority of students rather than the minority who are fast learners. So teachers give more time to the average and below average students... slow students are getting more attention in KBSR.

(Interview Conversation in English, 25.2.86)

The interview data reveal that a number of the interviewees^s at the centre do not agree with the 'horizontal' stand taken by the CDC regarding enrichment; nevertheless they generally try to abide by the decision taken. The following are extracts from the interviews with teacher educators concerning enrichment:

The enrichment programme is still being debated. When we say enrichment, we interpret it to mean vertical enrichment but CDC feels it should be horizontal....The problem, I suppose, is that if we do vertical enrichment it will increase the gap between the above-average and the slow-learners. So according to KBSR, horizontal enrichment will give the fast learners more activities but they still wait for the slow learners to catch up...On the parents' part, those who are educationists feel that there should be vertical enrichment because children are easily bored by activities of the same level.

(Interview Conversation partially translated, 17.3.86)

To the bright pupils we must give them more... Do we teach them to bring them to a higher level, or do we give them more materials of the same level? To bring them to a higher level is a bit difficult at the moment mainly because we don't have the facilities in having children progressing at their own rate in the different subject areas, like American schools where you can have Grade 1 in Mathematics, Grade II in Language and so on.

(Interview Conversation in English, 17.3.86)

One of the teacher educators was critical of the horizontal version of enrichment proffered by the CDC, and came up with her own broad interpretation of what it should be:

I think the CDC concept of enrichment is a very narrow concept. Enrichment is seen as horizontal, not vertical...What exactly can we do under horizontal enrichment? If it's at the same level it's very limiting. When I'm with my students [teacher trainees], they have interpreted it as having games and certain

things to do. I think it could be something whereby the children could go deeper, but you must provide the facilities, like classroom library. Or have some other thing, whereby it's possible for the children to do some investigation - it could be of a practical nature, for enriching their knowledge...Enrichment is not subject-bound. Even if they could have a dance corner, have some costumes there and the children do play-acting, that is still enrichment, because working together itself is an enriching experience. So enrichment could be in any form - mental, physical, social; it's not confined to any particular subject area or content.

(Interview Conversation in English, 8.5.86)

Clearly here is a person whose conceptualisation of enrichment far exceeds the boundaries stipulated in KBSR. Unfortunately the majority of implementors, by virtue of their limited training and knowledge generally, are not able to conceptualise in this fashion.

With regard to Moral Education for non-Muslim children, as an alternative to Islamic Religious Education for Muslim children, in Chapter 6 I have raised the issue of the possibility of conflict between individual and societal values. The question I posed was whether, in such an event, rational reasons would triumph over conformity. The interview data seem to indicate that Moral Education is an overt apparatus for regulating the population. The following are extracts from interviews with planners:

Moral Education and Religious Education - a way of educating our children to behave well, to be considerate to others...

(Interview Conversation translated, 3.6.86)

That religious and moral component is there to make sure he [the Malaysian child] is that wholesome child again... not too westernised...

(Interview Conversation in English, 19.5.86)

In Moral Education, the sky is the limit. You talk about moral issues, what are the ethics behind it... You can talk rationally about things.. something that is tentative. Our society is multi-racial and there are different values.... But in the schools we don't want to encourage so [too much] diverse thinking. We encourage arguments and discussions but the teacher must guide his pupils to a compromise...

(Interview Conversation in English, 10.5.86)

A further insight into the interviewees' perception and understanding of KBSR was gained by asking them how they would assess the successful implementation, or implementors, of KBSR - that is, what criteria would they use to make the assessment. The interview data show a wide range of emphases, and no unanimity even within the same group of planners, inspectors or teacher educators. Several criteria were mentioned by these 'centre' personnel, as shown in Table 6. Some focus on the more observable aspects of KBSR such as the use of teaching aids while others focus on the more qualitative features of child-centredness such as enjoyment of learning. Let me cite a few examples from the interview data. One of the planners, differing from her colleague who would look for statistical evidence of success, viewed the question of success in broad terms as she said:

I cannot say that KBSR is successfully implemented, but the effect of KBSR is seen in the schools. For one thing, you see classes with a semblance of KBSR - charts and such things. And teachers are planning [doing plans]

Table 6: Criteria for Successful Implementation of KBSR
(as conceived by 'centre' personnel)

Interviewees	Phrases used
Planners	<p>Statistical evidence of improved achievement in the basics. Achievement of 70 percent target in the 3Rs. Planned teaching Use of charts and maps Children enjoy learning Children interested in learning Children speak freely, questioning, no longer timid. More pupil involvement and participation.</p>
Inspectors	<p>Mastery of skills Objectives achieved Ability of teacher to handle three ability groups. Teacher's preparation - materials and aids Classroom interaction - pupils active/passive Questioning children Children interested Use of reasoning Stimulating environment</p>
Teacher Educators	<p>Achievement of basic skills Achievement of overall development Child-centred approach Ability of teacher to motivate pupils Materials used Pupils interested in learning Remediation and enrichment Keeping performance and profile records of pupils</p>

to teach.. the idea of going into a classroom bugs them and so they sit down and plan...it's something I would be satisfied with. KBSR has done that - made teachers look at themselves as teachers, KBSR has made them draw maps and charts and things, things that were not in fashion in the seventies. Once you were a trained teacher you just go to a classroom with empty hands, you might plan just two minutes before your lessons. So in a way we have achieved something... make teachers work...

(Interview Conversation in English, 19.5.86)

In contrast, conception of criteria for successful implementation of KBSR could be much more specific, as is evidenced by the following response from an inspector:

Personally when I go into classrooms I want to know what the teacher is teaching, what objectives are achieved at the end of the lesson... I look at the [teaching-learning] process, how the teacher tries to achieve the objectives, what kind of activities, whether there is [proper] sequencing. How does the teacher introduce concepts, whole -class or group by group ...I expect to see some group activities as well... From the children's work we assess whether the children really follow the lesson and are able to master the skills Of course from the interaction between the teacher and the pupils, we can find out whether they are active or not, whether they are interested in the lesson...

(Interview Conversation in English, 25.2.86)

The above view contrasts sharply with the idealistic view of child-centredness expressed by another inspector who said:

If a teacher is able to produce in his classroom a group of active children in the teaching-learning process, participating, questioning, answering, doing activities with the use of reasoning rather than depending on the teacher most of the time - that's it!. ...A teacher who is able to provide a stimulating environment is a successful teacher. With that kind of environment, there's no reason why any child should fail, because when we have stimulated the child to learn, what more do you want? It's stimulation [that is important].

(Interview Conversation in English, 18.3.86)

There are divergences of perception among the teacher educators as well. Consider the following interview data:

If it's just to ensure that learning is taking place, that [way of evaluating success] was in the old curriculum too. I believe what we want is a child-centred approach... I think a successful teacher is one who is able to motivate her students to want to go on further, very interested all the time in terms of learning... If you have such a teacher, then KBSR is successful.

(Interview Conversation in English, 8.5.86)

You must see whether the teachers are doing what they should be doing. You must look at the lessons. If the lesson requires a lot of materials...is the teacher carrying out the activities. Is he making any effort to give enrichment to the bright pupils and to do remedial work with the poor pupils. Does he keep tabs on the pupils' progress and achievement. Does the teacher keep records-the performance and profile records...

(Interview Conversation in English, 17.3.86)

It is obvious from the above two citations that these two teacher educators differ in their perception of what would constitute successful implementation of KBSR. One of them, convinced that KBSR is child-centred, considers motivation and pupils' interest as indicators of success. The other seems to be more rigid and expects teachers to be 'doing what they should be doing' as criteria for the successful implementation of KBSR. This is an orientation which leans more towards a process-product or input-output approach characteristic of the traditional curriculum. The emphasis is on what is observable and measurable in the classroom and the qualitative aspects of KBSR are thus eclipsed.

2.2 The Midway

This group consists of nine education officers who are involved in the implementation of KBSR at the state and district levels. How do their perception and understanding of KBSR compare with those of the personnel at the centre? The differences in the academic background and experiences of these officers seem to lead to differences in their capacity to understand KBSR. What strikes me as most remarkable is the wide range in their understanding and perception of KBSR, even though they are jointly entrusted with the effective implementation of the new curriculum in their region or district. At one end are the critical apperceptors of KBSR, while at the other are those who seem to be rather confused over certain KBSR concepts and classroom practices. I shall illustrate this by referring to the interview data.

First of all, let ^{me take} the question of the philosophy of KBSR. This is something over which one of the administrators was most critical, as she pointed to inconsistencies within KBSR:

.....they expect decentralisation, they expect innovation, they expect creativitiy....How can the teacher be creative when it [the time allocation] is already structured? So many minutes for Bahasa, so many minutes for English...Ideally if it is supposed to be geared for the individual, a child coming from an English-speaking background may not need as much English as

others. That is why I say there is no philosophy - there are aims, there are objectives, but I don't think I see a philosophy behind it [KBSR]....

(Interview Conversation in English, 9.4.86)

However, this administrator agreed that there was a need for a skill-based curriculum, offering a rationale as follows:

The shift is necessary with the present trend in knowledge explosion. It is not possible for any educational institution or any curriculum to be designed to teach the child everything that he/she should know in the field of knowledge. So with this in view the child should therefore be given skills, skills that the child can develop in his or her own time, for his or her own use, as and when the need arises.

(Interview Conversation in English, 9.4.86).

In contrast, another administrator interviewed seemed never to have heard of the word 'philosophy' before (Interview Conversation, 11.4 .86) - obviously he had not read the basic KBSR documents at all. Yet another seemed to be apathetic or indifferent towards this question, as is evidenced by the following data:

Researcher: If you were to put in a nutshell, what would you say is the philosophy of KBSR?

Administrator: I can't remember... there's a lot [written in the KBSR documents].

(Interview Conversation translated, 14.4.86)

It is most disturbing that there are administrators who do

not know the philosophy of KBSR or do not care to remember it, much less reflect upon it, yet these are officers entrusted with the effective implementation of KBSR.

With regard to the essence of KBSR, one of ^{the} administrators considers 'flexibility in approach' as the most important aspect of the new curriculum, because there is provision in KBSR for the classroom teachers to adapt and modify where necessary: 'Schools do not have to follow it hundred percent. If the teacher can improve on it, all the better; we are flexible...the teacher is Master of the class' (Interview Conversation partially translated, 14.4.86). On the other hand, there are administrators who seem to have a superficial understanding of KBSR and tend to take its emphasis on basic skills to the extreme. Consider the following data:

The difference [between the old and the new curricula] is not much, but the thing that we emphasize now is how many pupils cannot read rather than how many can read. We emphasize remediation, so we do not leave behind children who cannot read...According to the objective of KBSR, the thing that we emphasize, that bothers us, is not those who get 5A's [as in the old curriculum] but those who get 5E's. That is what we tell the teachers. Now under KBSR how many 5A's a school scores is no longer important, it's the 5E's that is important. That determines the performance of schools.

(Interview Conversation translated, 11.4.86)

..... we assess from the number of children who do not pass [tests], how many pupils do not master the 3Rs at the end of Year III. That means if twenty percent of the pupils do not master the 3Rs, that's a failure to the teacher...

(Interview Conversation partially translated, 4.4.86)

The above interview data seem to indicate a complete reversal or about-turn from a school system that stressed striving for excellence to one that stresses merely the mastery of basic skills. It can be argued, of course, that once children have mastered the basic skills they can forge ahead on their own. But bearing in mind the greater emphasis placed on the mastery of basic skills, are facilities made available for those who can progress faster? More importantly, do administrators and teachers have the capacity and the willingness to cater to the needs of the fast learners? If the stance taken by these two administrators is widespread, clearly this does not augur well for the Malaysian school system as a whole. While caring for the slow learners and ensuring that every child is literate is a noble cause, the neglect of excellence is surely something to be regretted.

In the previous section, I noted that a few personnel at the centre did not fully comprehend certain aspects of KBSR. The interview data indicate that such confusion and misunderstanding is even more rampant among personnel at the midway. In one instance, lack of understanding was revealed by the interviewee's contradictory statements, misconception and rigid interpretation of KBSR. The interviewee contradicted himself when he said, 'KBSR caters for the needs of those who are capable as well as those who are backward' as well as 'KBSR benefits the rural children more

than town children, it's not enough for town children because their IQ is high' (Interview Conversation in English, 4.4.86). This data also reveals a poor grasp of educational concept, as is evidenced by the indiscriminate use of the term IQ. This interviewee's rigid interpretation of KBSR is seen in the following statements: '... it is more or less compulsory for teachers to conduct lessons making use of group teaching..... ...It's only natural that teachign aids in particular are very, very essential' (Ibid). As I have noted earlier, the planner's view is that 'Methodology is not KBSR, KBSR is the essence....' Such flexibility has not been grasped at the midway, at least in the case of this administrator interviewed.

The concept of integration of subjects within KBSR has obviously not been fully comprehended by some midway personnel. One of the administrators interviewed came to the conclusion that since the subjects Geography, History and Science have been combined into Man and His Environment, children were 'learning less content' than in the old curriculum (Interview Conversation, 4.4.86). Another explained the purpose of integrating these subjects as follows:

Firstly, I think it makes it easier for pupils to learn. Its principle is that children are taught generally and not in depth...it is taught in themes, and elements from History, Science and others are included. So it is broad

but not deep. It is felt that children in the primary schools cannot think deeply, they can only think broadly and superficially.

(Interview Conversation translated, 4.4.86)

The interview data above represents this administrator's attempt at providing a rationale for the subject Man and His Environment. It is his own understanding and interpretation. There is no indication that he has ever heard of the principle of 'the unity of knowledge', the rationale normally given for the integration of subjects. Concerning his reference that 'children in the primary schools cannot think deeply', I am reminded of the famous statement made by Bruner that any child can be taught any subject at any stage of development (Bruner, 1966).

The issue of streaming has also not been fully understood by some 'midway' personnel. Consider the following interview data:

KBSR does not encourage streaming according to classes. So the streaming is done within the class itself - the fast group, the average and the slow learners. When the teacher is doing remedial work with the slow learners, the bright children are given enrichment activities.

(Interview Conversation translated, 4.4.86)

It seems an irony that streaming according to classes is discouraged and yet streaming within the class is interpreted as acceptable. The administrator does not see the existence of an anomaly in this situation. He seems to have cast group teaching, as advocated by KBSR, into the mould of streaming. Undoubtedly this is the practice in

most schools - streaming within the classroom with all its attendant ills and implications.

Enrichment, over which there has been a great deal of controversy as I discussed in the previous section, is an aspect of KBSR given a limited interpretation at the midway. An administrator made the following points: (a) that enrichment must be in the same topic as the lesson taught by the teacher, and (b) that it is only for the fast learners. He elaborated this in the following manner:

Let's say a teacher is teaching a topic, 'Health', in a reading lesson. After the normal class teaching, the teacher does remedial work [with the slow learners] and the fast pupils need to be given enrichment. According to the principle, the enrichment carried out must not go beyond the topic of the lesson. That is, it must be about health too...But in the classrooms that I see, teachers normally allow their pupils to read whatever they like from the class library. This does not fulfil the aim of enrichment... After reading the topic 'Health', pupils should be asked to write on health too, for example, the spread of mosquitoes, health problems in schools. The theme must remain 'health'. If pupils read books on sports, for instance, that is already out, not fulfilling the primary objective of enrichment.

(Interview Conversation translated, 4.4.86)

Compared to the broad interpretation of enrichment given by the teacher educator, mentioned earlier, this perception of enrichment appears to be very restrictive, and probably repressive from the teacher's point of view when implementing KBSR.

2.3 The Periphery

The interviewees classified in this group are eleven Key Personnel (KPs), two headteachers and two teachers. Essentially they are all primary teachers, with the same academic and professional qualifications: a school certificate and a certificate of education from a local teacher training college, a Normal Class or a Regional/Day Training Centre. One of headteachers, however, has an additional qualification - a Child Development Certificate from London, while another one has a certificate in Remedial Education from one of the local colleges. It is useful to note here the process through which these periphery personnel became acquainted with KBSR concepts, that is, the nature of the exposure courses or training they received before implementing KBSR. I have already commented on the inadequacy of the KBSR courses held for KPs earlier (Chapter 6). Of the eleven KPs I interviewed, only two had attended the original KP course conducted by the CDC. The rest had merely attended exposure courses held by the state Education Departments and/or subject-area courses held by the CDC.

In the case of headteachers, the blueprint for implementing KBSR envisaged that all headteachers and senior assistants (deputy heads) would be given a five-day exposure course to orientate them towards KBSR. The actual implementation of this plan, however, fell far short of its target. In the state of Selangor, for instance, the KBSR

orientation course for headteachers in 1981 was only over a period of three days and in 1982 it was reduced further to two days. What was more, not every headmaster had the opportunity to attend these courses. Siti Hawa (1986) found that of the twenty seven headteachers in her study, four had received no formal exposure towards KBSR at all, and among those who did attend an orientation course, the general feeling was that 'it was inadequate to enable them to supervise their teachers properly. It was too short... and was more concerned with administrative matters' (Siti Hawa, 1986, p.185). Of the two headmasters I interviewed, one had never attended any KBSR course. As we shall see, this lapse in implementation strategy affects KBSR adversely.

The responsibility of training in-service teachers to orientate them towards KBSR has been entrusted upon state Education Departments. The plan was to hold ten day courses for teachers, to be conducted during the year before implementation of a particular grade level of KBSR. Thus, teachers teaching Year I of KBSR in 1983 would undergo training in 1982, those implementing Year II of KBSR in 1984 would receive training in 1983, and so forth. Each State was to use their KPs as trainers of the teachers. In the state of Selangor, the initial KBSR courses for teachers were for a period of eight days, out of which only five hours were allocated for the exposure of KBSR as a whole, the rest of the time being allocated to specific subjects

(Siti Hawa, 1986, p.181). In my study, of the two teachers interviewed, one had attended a ten-day course conducted by the CDC as an observer, while the other had attended a ten-day course organized by the District Education Office.

I have pointed out earlier that confusion and misunderstanding over certain KBSR concepts and practices occur among personnel at the centre as well as personnel at the midway. As such, it would be convenient to presume that such confusion and misunderstanding would be more rampant among personnel at the periphery, as they are further away from the centre or the planners. This proves to be true to some extent, but the interview data also indicate that there are periphery personnel who are very enlightened regarding KBSR, perhaps more so than some of the centre or midway personnel. So it is not simply a case of the KBSR 'message' becoming more and more diluted, distorted or incomprehensible as it travels from the centre to the periphery. I shall try to explain this phenomenon later. For the moment, let me examine the perception and understanding of periphery personnel over certain KBSR concepts and practices.

Probably as a consequence of the limited nature of KBSR courses attended by the KPs, the interview data indicate that they were vague and uncertain when it came to questions on KBSR as a whole. It will be remembered that the

rationale and philosophy of KBSR received scant attention in the KP course (see Chapter 6); predictably, the KPs demonstrated a general lack of understanding of KBSR. However, they were clear of at least one objective to be achieved - the mastery of the 3Rs. The interview data show that they knew little of the concept of overall development but they were all convinced that the emphasis on learning basic skills was very important. One of them said that the objective of mastery of the 3Rs was 'very noble' (Interview Conversation, 26.4.86). Another found KBSR 'a more effective way of teaching than before' (Interview Conversation, 2.5.86). Yet another concluded that KBSR was better than the old curriculum because the evaluations they had carried out for Years I, II, III and IV showed that children had performed better in Bahasa Malaysia, with a ninety percent mastery of the subject for each year (Interview Conversation, 24.4.86). This emphasis on the objective of mastery of the 3Rs was highlighted by the headteachers and teachers as well, though not quite so much in the case of one of the headteachers. For Miss Bibah, the headteacher of School B, KBSR represented 'learning in a more interesting way... it has made learning more interesting and more meaningful to the child' (Interview Conversation in English, 22.5.86).

Generally the KPs were quite knowledgeable when discussing their own subject areas, but when attempts were

made to relate their particular subject to other subjects within KBSR, their lack of knowledge and understanding became apparent. This is most regrettable, considering that KBSR is to some extent an integrated curriculum. The practice of appointing KPs according to subjects - as was the case during pre-KBSR days when KPs were appointed for curriculum projects such as Science and Mathematics - seems to result in the perpetuation of subject compartmentalization.

One of the two KPs for Bahasa Malaysia interviewed, underscoring the greater emphasis placed on skills in KBSR than in the old curriculum, said: '... KBSR makes teachers teach until pupils achieve the objectives as specified in the syllabus' (Interview Conversation translated, 24.4.86). Unlike the old curriculum, these two KPs pointed out, KBSR makes a conscious effort to relate Bahasa Malaysia to other subjects such as Physical Education, Art Education and Moral Education. In addition, elements from other disciplines such as Geography and History are incorporated into Bahasa Malaysia and indirectly taught to pupils during the first three years, before the introduction of the subject Man and His Environment in Year IV. While they were able to articulate the demand made by KBSR, they were not able to offer a satisfactory rationale for such integration of subjects. When asked, the only explanation given was that it reduced the number of subjects to be learnt by the

children - an important reason, no doubt, especially when KBSR is juxtaposed against the old, overloaded curriculum, nevertheless it is rather mundane. Educational concepts such as the unity of knowledge or reinforcement seem to be foreign to them. The teachers in the study, too, did not have a clear rationale for the practice of integration. In fact, among personnel at the periphery, only the KP for Man and His Environment was able to justify integration convincingly, as evidenced by the following response:

In the past when the subjects were separated, the relationship between one subject and another was not given attention. At times the same content was repeated ...it is hoped that in KBSR the problem of overlapping and repetitiveness will be avoided with the introduction of Man and His Environment. Secondly, when there is integration the subject becomes more meaningful to the pupils. It also reduces the pupils' load in terms of the number of subjects.....

(Interview Conversation translated, 2.5.86)

With regard to grouping or group teaching, there are differences in the perception and understanding of the periphery personnel, just as differences occurred among the centre and midway personnel, discussed earlier. Some perceive grouping as a necessity in KBSR while others consider it as a recommendation to be implemented at the teacher's own discretion. One of the most enlightened KPs explained that there were four methods of teaching:

..... Class method, group method, peer method and individual method. But the emphasis in KBSR is on group method, because it cannot be denied that individual differences exist. This does not mean that individual method is not used at all. There are times when the

individual method is used, especially for remediation; the teacher can also use the peer method, whereby he can ask the bright child to assist him in carrying out teaching and learning by helping weaker pupils.....

(Interview Conversation translated, 26.4.86)

One of the headteachers interviewed was convinced that teaching according to KBSR meant dividing the pupils in a class into three groups, 'so that the teacher can spend more time with the slow learners, the fast ones can be given cards and materials' (Interview Conversation translated, 24.4.86). The other headteacher expressed a clearer understanding as she said:

I think grouping is important in the KBSR context in the sense that it helps the teacher particularly to do individual work with the children... I think class teaching should be done at the beginning when the lesson is being introduced; after that the teacher will have to teach them in groups, according to their abilities... I told them [the teachers] the grouping should not be permanent, they should regroup. Sometimes they [the pupils] may be good in language but not in numbers, so they should be regrouped...

(Interview Conversation in English, 22.5.86)

A complaint that KBSR demanded more than what was feasible to be carried out in terms of grouping was made by one of the teachers, but she felt quite justified with the way she organized her class, her guideline being 'so long as the children learn'. The following is her argument:

When I attended the [KBSR] course, they [the trainers] wanted us to do more group work, more enrichment, more remedial work. But I think not in our situation. We have too many in a class, too big a class. And maybe in this school our children are progressing at more or less a moderate pace. So I think I'm not carrying out a hundred percent what they told us to do. But whatever we

do is for the children's good, that's what I feel. As long as the children learn... that's good enough. To group them into smaller groups is quite impossible.
(Interview Conversation in English, 30.5.86)

Virtually all the KPs interviewed interpreted enrichment as something to be given to the 'fast learners' or 'advanced learners'. However, the issue of whether enrichment should be related to the topic taught or otherwise was a matter over which the KPs showed differences of understanding, as did other groups I discussed earlier. Some were convinced, or at least preferred, that enrichment be 'horizontal' and related to the topic taught. Others, such as the KP for Mathematics, recommended to teachers to 'extend the skills [of the pupils], don't just stick to the Handbook, it's only a guide' (Interview Conversation translated, 26.4.86). A KP who seemed to have a broader understanding of enrichment explained that enrichment could be either specific or general: giving the fast learners a crossword puzzle related to the topic already learnt would be a specific enrichment, while allowing the children to play chess would be a general enrichment (Interview Conversation, 26.4.86).

In discussing the perception and understanding of the midway personnel earlier, I made the observation that the emphasis on the 3Rs could be taken to the extreme, at the expense of excellence in education. This seems to be confirmed by one of the KPs, who has come to the conclusion that '...There is more remediation than enrichment in KBSR' (Interview Conversation translated, 26.4.86). Convinced

that the enrichment aspects of KBSR have not been fully implemented, he has suggested to the Education Office that the old 'express class' system be revived; this would give an opportunity to fast learners to complete their primary education in five instead of six years.

Earlier in this chapter, I have pointed out that the subject Moral Education - despite listing as one of its objectives the advancement of rational reasons - is perceived by personnel at the centre as an apparatus for regulating the population. A similar perception exists at the periphery, as is evidenced by the following data obtained from my interview with the KP for Moral Education:

The primary aim [of Moral Education] is to give a character education, to mould the character of the pupils, to produce pupils of good character, bearing in mind that nowadays morals have declined...so it is appropriate that moral education be given priority, it is urgently needed.

(Interview Conversation translated, 26.3.86)

In the above data morals seems to be interpreted by the KP as synonymous with good behaviour. There are evidences to suggest that this is the prevalent interpretation among the majority of Malaysians. It is no accident that Moral Education is taught to non-Muslim children as an alternative to the Islamic Religious Education taught to Muslim children. A common agenda in both subjects seems to be the need to make children conform to a certain standard of behaviour rather than to reason and come to independent

decisions. Yet, when looking at the strategy recommended for teaching Moral Education, one gets a different picture. Consider the following interview data:

..... most of the time there are discussions. During the second phase [Years 4,5,6] the children are more mature in their thinking... they begin to question us.. but we encourage this. So we discuss. We use our discretion to give the correct guidance, rationally. Decision lies in the hands of the pupils themselves...The role of the teacher is that we give effective guidance. We cannot force anything on them....

(Interview Conversation translated, 26.3.86)

It does look as though the discussion method used for teaching the subject will lead to an 'open' situation where differences of opinion will be accepted. However, according to the KP, at the end of the discussion the teacher would inform her class what she herself would have done in such a situation or the decision she would make when faced with a certain problem (Ibid). Thus there is an attempt here to impose the 'correct' value, albeit indirectly.

Finally, I should like to refer to the point I made earlier - that KBSR concepts and practices do not necessarily become more incomprehensible as the KBSR 'message' is disseminated from the centre to the periphery. As can be seen from the interview data already presented, it is not the case that personnel at the centre are more enlightened than those at the periphery. A clear understanding of KBSR as well as confusion occur at all levels: at the centre, the midway, and the periphery.

Perhaps I can emphasize this point by giving as a further illustration the contrasting perception and understandingⁿ of the two headteachers interviewed, both of whom are at the periphery. One can be characterised as having a clear understanding of KBSR as a child-centred curriculum, while the other has a superficial knowledge of KBSR and is often rather confused. In the course of my interviews with these two headteachers (Interviews on 24.4.86 and 22.5.86), several phrases were used by them with reference to KBSR, as presented in Table 7. These phrases reflect the extent to which KBSR has been understood or misunderstood by them.

How is it possible that KBSR is perceived and understood by some actors as a child-centred curriculum and by others merely as a 3R curriculum, irrespective of whether they are at the centre, midway or periphery? How can this phenomenon be explained? The answer to these questions seems to be in the professional background and experiences of the various actors. In the case of the contrasting headteachers, Headteacher A has never attended any in-service course since he left a Day Training College twenty three years ago, and he has not been given any formal orientation towards KBSR prior to his appointment as headteacher. The little that he knows about KBSR was gained by 'observing other teachers while I was a teacher in my previous school, seeing how they taught using the new methods' (Interview Conversation translated, 24.4.86). Hence his limited and superficial

Table 7: Phrases used by Headteachers A and B
with reference to KBSR

Headteacher	Phrases used
Headteacher A	<p>KBSR's aim: to give teaching in a formal way to children.</p> <p>Teachers use a lot of teaching aids.</p> <p>Various materials used instead of text-books and blackboard only.</p> <p>Easier for pupils to receive lessons.</p> <p>Grouping in a class a necessity.</p> <p>No problem whatsoever in the implementation of KBSR.</p>
Headteacher B	<p>Learning in a more interesting way.</p> <p>Children being able to choose what interest them.</p> <p>More interesting and meaningful learning.</p> <p>No obstacles to stop fast learners from progressing.</p> <p>A flexible curriculum, teachers can alter or modify it where necessary.</p> <p>Class teaching as well as group teaching in KBSR.</p> <p>Groupings not to be permanent.</p> <p>KBSR good for fast as well as slow learners.</p> <p>Makes learning more enjoyable and more fun.</p> <p>Problem of implementation: financial constraint.</p>

knowledge of KBSR . Headteacher B, on the other hand, has attended KBSR courses conducted by the CDC right from its inception. Thus by the time I interviewed her she has benefited from six KBSR courses (Year I-Year VI), each course running for a duration of one week. In addition, she had attended a Child Development course in London, during which time, no doubt, she had been initiated into child-centred education. It is most probable that this latter course, more than the six KBSR courses, has given her the insight and vision of KBSR as a child-centred curriculum.

Among the other personnel interviewed, understanding of KBSR or the lack of it can also be traced to their professional background and experiences. Among the inspectors, for instance, those who have attended courses in the West - whether at degree, diploma or postgraduate levels - tend to perceive KBSR as a child-centred curriculum. Again, when I compare the inspectors and the teacher educators as two separate groups, the latter seem to be more enlightened and have a greater understanding of the KBSR concepts and practices. This is possibly due to two reasons:

- a. In the course of carrying out their task as lecturers - giving lectures, guiding and advising teacher-trainees - teacher educators have had to do extra readings and references, and this ensures that they are to a certain

extent well-informed and up-to-date with educational principles and practices. In contrast, the duty of the inspectors does not necessitate prior readings before they enter the classroom. Their reports arise out of their inspection, and it is entirely up to the individual inspectors to enrich themselves professionally or otherwise.

- b. Besides their basic bachelor degree from a Malaysian University, four of the teacher educators interviewed have attended courses overseas, either in the United States or Britain, leading to a professional diploma or a Master's degree. The only one among them without such added qualification has at least attended an attachment programme at Bristol University. The inspectorate, on the other hand, has a tendency to recruit for its inspectors graduates who had earlier been experienced teachers, and it does not seem to have a concerted programme for their professional development. I would contend that years of teaching experience alone are no guarantee of a greater understanding of the newly introduced concepts in KBSR. This is demonstrated by the various misconceptions of certain KBSR concepts on the part of some inspectors, as well as the lack of understanding among a number of personnel at the midway.

Early in this thesis (Chapter 1) I made the suggestion that child-centredness was actually a concept foreign to most members of the Malaysian educational establishment. The interview data seem to support this. It has been demonstrated that:

1. The newly-introduced child-centred concepts and practices of KBSR have not been fully comprehended by some of the personnel at the centre, midway and periphery, whose formal exposure to KBSR had been through short, orientation courses that stress 'how to' more than its rationale, philosophy and a deeper understanding of KBSR generally.

2. Personnel whose acquaintance with KBSR was made through 'observing other teachers' had only a superficial knowledge of it and had the least understanding of KBSR as a child-centred curriculum.

3. Personnel who have earlier been initiated into child-centredness, particularly through attending courses in the West, do perceive and understand KBSR as a child-centred curriculum.

3. PROBLEMS OF IMPLEMENTATION

It has been established in the previous section that there is a lack of understanding and perception of the conceptual

apparatuses of KBSR, and their implications for classroom practices, among a number of the personnel involved in this curriculum change. I shall now examine the interview data for problems of implementation as perceived and anticipated by the planners and as actually encountered by the implementors. The purpose is to seek for further explanations as to why KBSR works as it does. After all, the literature on curriculum change suggests that it has been much easier to propose new curricula than to accomplish curriculum implementation, that problems invariably crop up during the course of implementation (see, for example, Goodlad and Klein, 1979; Salter and Tapper, 1981). In the case of KBSR, it is possible that the nature of the relationship between the proposed innovation and the reality in schools has not been explicitly considered. In other words, one might ask what are the possibilities of implementing a child-centred curriculum in Malaysian primary schools.

In the following analysis of the interview data on implementation, I shall distinguish between the problems of implementation as conceived by the planners and as actually encountered by the implementors. The former consists of four interviewees from the CDC, whose responsibilities include developing the curriculum and monitoring its implementation. The latter is made up of all the other

interviewees, all of whom are participants in the implementation process in one way or another (see Table 5).

3.1 As Conceived by the Planners

According to one of the planners interviewed, two problems were foreseen, namely: (a) the problem of teachers as implementors of KBSR and (b) problems in monitoring distant schools. This planner added that finance was not a problem because 'we had the full backing of the government and there are special grants for each school, \$5,000 per school per year for six years' (Interview Conversation in English, 27.3.86). Another planner gave a lengthy response, identifying the problems foreseen and the steps taken to overcome them; at the same time she acknowledged the shortfall in the planning. In her own words:

..... We foresaw a lot of problems. First, we were going to do with less textbooks, that means you must have alternatives. Now, how good are our teachers, how self-directed...Most of our materials - our aim is to strengthen the teachers.. Children have different abilities, interests and readiness. So we should be preparing graded materials for them. But however good our materials, our teaching kit, teachers are the ones who have to decide which one is for which group or child. That is the problem, this kind of problem we foresaw, we know our teachers quite well...[But] even though we foresaw that teachers were going to meet problems, the problem they encountered at the beginning of implementation was more than what we expected...Not only do teachers have to prepare materials, they have to do continuous evaluation, they have to deal with remediation and enrichment...We foresaw problems, but not the magnitude of it ...And of course the problem of number. We were thinking of 35 as the maximum [in a class], but facilities are all lagging behind; pupils increase, we

need classrooms and teachers - these are beyond our scope ...We need qualified remedial teachers, the KBSR teacher cannot cope with everything...

(Interview Conversation in English, 10.5.86)

Responding to the same question of whether problems were foreseen, another planner gave a totally different answer, as follows:

To be honest, no. Because we thought we had come up with the 3Rs. It is so simple anybody worth his salt as a teacher can teach the programme. But what happened was we became ambitious when we sat down to write the syllabus, then we came up with methodologies we put in too many new ideas. At the implementation level we went overboard - not with what children should learn but how teachers should teach. And parents being the greatest culprits, they wanted their children to be seen learning. They complained Mathematics was too simple for their children.. when they applied that kind of pressure on the teachers and they [the teachers] went back to what they were comfortable in, that's the old curriculum. If only the teachers had resisted.. But people were afraid, afraid to be different. And I think we didn't give them enough support, not enough of us to go round giving support to teachers...

(Interview Conversation in English, 19.5.86)

Thus we have different conceptions of implementation problems from different planners. The common thread in their responses, as I see it, is their recognition of teachers' professional inadequacy. It is also interesting to note that, judging from the above interview data, it would appear that KBSR was initially thought of as a simple 3R curriculum - this is consistent with the first official announcement and early press coverage discussed earlier (Chapter 6) - but that it ended up doing a lot more things than originally intended. Yet, if it had not done so, the

planners cannot claim that the curriculum had responded to the recommendations of the Cabinet Committee (1979), particularly the one regarding overall development of the child.

In a reflexive, critical-self-evaluation vein, one of the planners considered decentralisation as one of the problems of implementation:

We planned but we didn't make ourselves clear to the states.. We said centralised planning and decentralised implementation. We were quite ready to decentralise implementation but the implementors were not, so they kept on coming back to us ... 'What do we do in this situation? Is this right?' And we enjoyed that centralised feeling as we said 'Yes, you are doing it right', 'No, you are not doing it right'...

(Interview Conversation in English, 19.5.86)

Incidentally, the above interview data seems to answer a question I raised earlier as to whether implementors would have the ability or the willingness to take action and make decisions without referring to central agencies. It is clear that the chances of independent decision-making occurring at the periphery are minimal. The traditional practice of receiving directives from the top seems to have become ingrained. What is more, KBSR is implemented within the framework of the existing hierarchical educational structure. Thus it seems unlikely that the periphery will be able to make autonomous decisions.

3.2 As Encountered by Implementors

To the inspectors, teacher educators, administrators and KPs, teachers' professional inadequacy is high on their list of implementation problems, just as it had been anticipated by the planners. This problem was highlighted by a teacher educator who said:

In some schools that I have observed, the teachers seem to have fixed groups throughout for all subjects. This should not be the case, actually, because the groupings could be different for Bahasa, Mathematics and so on, and there may not even be groupings for subjects like Physical Education... In terms of imparting the content, many teachers are not able to vary between different groups ... And they are sticking so rigidly to the Handbooks given by CDC, not able to go away and be creative on their own.

(Interview Conversation in English, 8.5.86)

One of the inspectors interviewed opined that too much was expected of the classroom teacher with regard to remediation. As he explained:

In KBSR teachers are expected to have a record of these kids - what are their learning problems, their social and family background, and what are the strategies [for remediation] the teachers want to carry out...To a large extent many teachers are not able to carry out what are suggested in the Guide. The reasons are many: one, because of big classes; another reason is many teachers said 'I don't know what to do'; another reason is many teachers have not even seen the Guide; another one is they don't have enough materials [for remedial work].

(Interview Conversation in English, 7.4.86)

The teachers, it would seem from the above data, have not come up to the expectation of the planners; or rather the planners did not take into account sufficiently the professional inadequacy of the teachers with regard to

remedial work when KBSR was planned, or if they did their expectation was rather unrealistic. In addition, there is also the constraint of faulty or inadequate provision, as evidenced by the shortage of materials and the fact that some teachers have not even seen the Guide.

The problem of professional inadequacy is also apparent in the teaching of the integrated subject Man and His Environment, as many teachers are not capable of using the inquiry method advocated. For some teachers their basic knowledge of Science and Geography is too limited, resulting in their lack of confidence in teaching the integrated subject. As pointed out by an administrator, 'some of these teachers are holders of the Lower Certificate of Education [three years of secondary schooling] only and they have to deal with respiration, oxidation...too high for them' (Interview Conversation translated, 29.4.86). One of the KPs interviewed identified the negative attitude towards change as a problem in teaching Man and His Environment, saying that some teachers were not even convinced that children could learn better through the inquiry method, these being 'teachers who have taught the old curriculum for far too long'

↑
(Interview Conversation translated, 2.5.86)

The problem of teacher inadequacy is perhaps best summed up by the administrator who lamented over and over again

teachers' lack of perception and insight, as shown in the following data:

Right now I think what the teachers are doing is they do what they have been asked to do, what they are taught to do, without having conceptualised and come to the point where he or she has the perception of what his or her role is as a KBSR teacher.

By and large they all follow [the Handbook] to the letter, so much so that you get Standard III pupils adding and subtracting using their hands or materials.. because according to the Book they have to be taught with materials.

The teachers have not conceptualised their role. They don't really know how many percentage of their own, let's say, common sense should go into their work because they will look [at the Handbook]. Whatever is not there, 'I don't know'.

(Interview Conversation in English, 9.4.86)

Thus the interview data indicate overwhelmingly that professional inadequacy is a major problem in the implementation of KBSR. Yet it would be grossly unfair to put the blame squarely on the teachers for the deficiencies in KBSR implementation. One has to take into account several factors that have led to this state of affairs. As I have pointed out in this and previous chapters, child-centred education is an 'alien' concept; KBSR as a child-centred curriculum represents a fundamental change from the traditional curriculum, encompassing not only changes in classroom practices but also the philosophical-pedagogical assumptions underlying these. Undoubtedly newly-introduced child-centred concepts are difficult to grasp for most Malaysian primary teachers, some of whom had only three

years of secondary schooling and a few even less. This factor has not been given sufficient weight in the implementation strategy. To expect them to come to terms with child-centred practices overnight - while in Britain and the United States child-centredness evolved over time (see Chapter 2) - is highly unrealistic. The hasty implementation of KBSR, necessitating as it did the inservice training of teachers through short orientation courses that emphasized how to teach at the expense of a deeper understanding of the KBSR philosophy and rationale, was obviously not much of a help in enlightening the teachers. Add to these the large classes, the shortage of materials, etc.

My argument as outlined above finds support in the empirical data in which a teacher educator referred to the constraints in child-centred education. It is difficult to implement child-centred education in Malaysia, she says, firstly because teachers do not know much about it. Secondly, even if they do know, the large number of children in a class militate against child-centred practices. The third reason given is the poor intake of trainees into colleges in the past: 'For one to have an interest in child-centred education, one must have an interest in children, must have chosen teaching as a profession because you like the job. But quite a number of them have gone into teaching not by choice but because there were no other

alternatives...' (Interview Conversation in English, 8.5.86). Yet another reason given is that in the past,

..... teachers were so used to being spoon-fed all along, they were given syllabuses and textbooks and those were all they needed for teaching. Now when you ask them to come up with something on their own, not having been used to such a system, the whole idea is so overwhelming to them, it's like a mental block...

(Ibid)

The dilution of the KBSR 'message' is also seen as a problem which affects implementation. In the words of a teacher educator, 'The idea is good, but when it reaches the people who implement it, it has been watered down; teachers do not fully receive it' (Interview Conversation in English, 14.3.86). A similar concern was expressed by an inspector who said,

We can't be sure whether the teachers fully understand KBSR. They have attended courses ... but there are some weaknesses, because the teachers do not receive [skills/knowledge/information on KBSR] directly from the CDCIn the course of its travel from CDC to the teachers, there must be some dilution. The people who pass the information to the teachers, sometimes they themselves are not sure, for example they tell the teachers, 'I receive this [directive/recommendation], you put it into practice please'.

(Interview Conversation translated, 21.3.86)

Flexible time-tabling as advocated in KBSR remains, in

reality, a theory. Implementors point out that in practice it is not feasible to have a flexible time-table because subjects like Religious Education, Music and sometimes Physical Education are taught by specialist teachers who have to follow specific time schedules in order to be able to move from class to class. Yet another constraint is that members of the Inspectorate who visit schools expect teachers to stick to rigid time-tables. The inspectors, who have their own specialised subject areas, expect classroom activities to be carried out just as specified in the time-tables, for they visit the classrooms to see their particular subjects being taught. 'So in that sense, you see, KBSR as a concept has decentralised education but our setup ^{is} still a centralised setup' (Interview Conversation in English, 9.4.86).

The subjects Moral Education, Physical Education and Art Education share a common problem of implementation - they are regarded by many teachers as peripheral or unimportant subjects, in view of the greater demands to be accountable for the children's mastery of the basics (Interview Conversation on 26.3.86 and 21.4.86). Thus despite the noble aims to be achieved through these subjects, the attitude adopted by the teachers is likely to be a barrier in the realization of those aims. In the case of Moral Education, a second problem concerns the freedom given to pupils to question their teachers. In the past teachers had

always been 'right' and it is difficult for them to accept a situation where children can also be right, where they are expected to make their own conclusions (Interview Conversation, 26.3.86). Clearly the inability of teachers to adapt to the new demand can be regarded as a barrier for the successful implementation of Moral Education.

Another problem of implementation was revealed by an administrator who was clearly dissatisfied with the little that her district could afford in terms of training the teachers to teach KBSR. She felt that the short courses given, often done in a hurry, were not effective enough. This problem was compounded by the attitude of some teachers who were not receptive to change. They resented having to prepare various teaching materials and having to attend courses during the school vacations. The interviewee concluded,

So with such an attitude and the enforced attendance at courses, probably not much is gained from courses and very little is put into practice in the classrooms. Thus we have the problem of physical grouping of children rather than group teaching....

(Interview Conversation translated, 30.5.86)

Teacher resistance and resentment, according to many interviewees, existed especially during the early period of implementation. The older teachers were said to be so set in their ways and convinced that their traditional methods needed no change, 'especially when their ex-students are already leaders of the country' (Interview Conversation

translated, 24.3.86). A teacher-educator pointed out that teacher resentment built up because their load increased but this was not given any recognition pay-wise. 'A lot of the older ones are resentful, having to come during their school holidays for courses when they really need a break' (Interview Conversation in English, 8.5.86). The apathetic attitude of some headteachers was also cited as a problem of implementation. As stated by an administrator,

..... Some of them store the teaching materials that we provide....in their rooms instead of passing them on to teachers. We have directed headteachers to set up a KBSR Committee in their schools but some do not follow the directive, and even if they do, they do not assume the expected role of chairman of the committee...

(Interview Conversation translated, 29.4.86)

The current shortage of primary teachers also poses a problem in the implementation of KBSR, as schools have had to employ temporary teachers who have no initial teacher training whatsoever. In addition, very often teachers from secondary schools, trained to teach older children, are deployed to primary schools. While fully aware of the need for temporary and secondary teachers to be oriented to KBSR if it were to be implemented successfully, the administrators are constrained by lack of time and finance to do so (Interview Conversation, 30.5.86). Here again it is a consequence of hastily implementing KBSR, without adequate planning as regards the number of teachers needed, much less provision for their training.

Administrators of implementation have also identified what I might perhaps call the 'nitty-gritty' not normally seen by outsiders. Take the problem of over-enrolment in schools, which consequently leads to classrooms of up to fifty children each, and also the same classrooms being used by a different set of teacher and pupils in the morning and afternoon sessions. To the administrators the adverse effects of such a situation are many, such as: (a) the classroom space is too limited for movement and activities to be carried out; (b) it is difficult to set up a reading corner or a classroom library, or other display corners, in the limited space; (c) there is a problem of storage facilities especially when the classrooms are used in the morning as well as afternoon sessions; and (d) the teacher has to prepare enough materials for the large number of children. With all these constraints, while experienced and dedicated teachers may be able to cope with the demand of KBSR, for the less experienced the pressure might be too great, hence the greater the likelihood of their abandoning new strategies of teaching and reverting to the old curriculum (Interview Conversation, 4.4.86)

The administrators are responsible for the supervision and monitoring of KBSR implementation in schools but what they are able to carry out is very much limited by the budget available to them. They cite the problem of not having enough officers and KPs to go around, especially as

some schools are located in remote areas. Even if there were enough officers there would still be the problem of inadequate fund to pay for their travel or mileage claims, so supervision is lacking in most cases. As revealed by one administrator,

We now stress supervising the Year of the implementation, that is, KBSR is now in its fourth year of implementation so teachers teaching Year IV get some supervision, those teaching Year I, II and III - God alone knows what they are doing. (Interview Conversation partially translated, 30.5.86)

After listing all the problems that have been encountered in the implementation of KBSR, an administrator concludes:

Financial constraint is the biggest problem. Actually I have lots of plans, I'd like to hold more courses for the teachers, update them...but every time I have to find money, I become a professional beggar. I now depend on other committees in the district such as the Safety Committee, the Information Department and so on...

(Interview Conversation in English, 30.5.86)

What this very resourceful administrator does is to get other organizations in the district to conduct courses for teachers using their budget. As these organizations need only a one-hour slot, the rest of the day is then given to the Education Office for its use. On other occasions this administrator resorts to getting financial aid from the

local Member of Parliament. Thus the financial problems of implementation in this district is partially solved by the very ingenuity and resourcefulness of an education officer. It is doubtful whether other states and districts can cope with the situation just as admirably.

In schools, too, financial constraint is one of the major problems encountered. Several of the KPs interviewed noted that this led to shortages such as 'lack of materials' (in Art Education) and 'inadequate apparatus' (in Physical Education). One of the headteachers cited as an example her teachers' requests for 'plenty of blank tapes, also transistors' (Interview Conversation, 22.5.86) which she could not fulfil despite frequent financial help from the Parent-Teacher Association.

It is indeed ironic that implementors trace a great deal of their implementation problems to financial constraints. This contrasts remarkably with the view of the planner who, as I mentioned earlier, claimed that finance was not a problem because KBSR had the full backing of the government and '....there are special grants for each school, \$5,000 per school per year for six years' (Interview Conversation in English, 27.3.86). Obviously the planning falls far short of the demands of implementation.

4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The analysis of the interview data in the foregoing pages may be summarised as follows:

1. Many of the actors in this curriculum change - whether at the centre, midway or periphery - do not fully comprehend the conceptual apparatuses of KBSR and their implications for classroom practices. Personnel who have had an earlier initiation into child-centred education, such as through attending educational courses abroad, have a deeper understanding of KBSR and perceive it as a child-centred curriculum.

2. Newly-introduced child-centred concepts/practices commonly misunderstood or confused are: overall development, integration of subjects, group teaching, remediation and enrichment, streaming/non-streaming and the inquiry method. There is generally a superficial understanding of the recommended KBSR practices, with a number of the interviewees unable to give the rationale underlying these practices.

3. Problems of implementation as encountered by the implementors far exceed those anticipated and conceived by the planners. Only two problems, teachers' professional inadequacy and large classes, are acknowledged by both planners and implementors. Other

problems identified by the implementors are : ineffective courses and dilution of the message; flexible time-tabling not feasible; shortage of trained primary teachers; inability to give adequate supervision; and, above all, financial constraints.

I shall now relate the findings to my research questions. My proposition was that KBSR would meet with difficulties because it introduces concepts and practices which are foreign to the Malaysian educational establishment and prevalent circumstances are not conducive to the successful implementation of such a curriculum (Chapter 1). In the main, the interview data have supported my proposition. Let me explicate these further.

The 'foreignness' of some KBSR concepts has been established, as evidence^d by interviewees' lack of understanding of these concepts; where interviewees have had a prior knowledge of child-centred education, they have a clearer conceptualisation of KBSR. Though planners had identified teacher inadequacy as a potential problem of implementation, the steps taken to overcome this obviously fell far short of the magnitude of the problem. In particular, I would contend that the need to initiate actors into child-centredness has not been fully appreciated. As we have seen, the KBSR courses held for KPs emphasized the practical aspects of the new curriculum at the expense of understanding its rationale and philosophy; one can only

conjecture as to how little teachers learn of the philosophical-pedagogical assumptions underlying KBSR as these KPs train the teachers in the cascade strategy of training, and often over shorter periods. I should like to emphasize this point further by citing the somewhat cavalier attitude of one of the planners interviewed when asked whether teachers understood the philosophy of KBSR. The following was the response:

I don't know whether teachers understand the philosophy...objectives they do. I don't think they know and I don't think they care. To them you don't go through all this philosophy - just tell them what you have to do and how you do it. Balanced development ... only the planners know....

(Interview Conversation in English, 27.3.86)

Ironically, a memorandum from the Director - General of Education to the Directors of the various professional divisions in the Ministry, dated 19th January 1982, stressed that the success of KBSR depended on many factors, one of which was '...that all teachers who are going to implement it not only understand the concept, but are also committed to it' (cited by Siti Hawa (1986), p.155).

At the implementation stage, the lack of emphasis in making teachers - and indeed other education personnel involved in the change process - understand KBSR is surely a

serious oversight. Implementors, generally characterised by lack of training^{and} professionalism, are not enabled to effect KBSR merely by being given short exposure courses. Here the blame must be shared by the Ministry of Education generally, for having made the decision to implement KBSR hastily, without adequate provision in terms of time, personnel, facilities, finance and so forth. As recounted by one of the planners, the planning stage of KBSR began right after the announcement for curriculum change was made by the Minister of Education in December 1980. There was 'feverish work in 1981, we succumbed to political pressures sometimes' (Interview Conversation in English, 10.5.86), 1982 was the tryout or trial period, and in 1983 KBSR was launched nation-wide. Certainly the planners would have welcomed a longer period of planning before implementation (Ibid). It can be concluded from the interview data that KBSR has not been well thought-out in terms of not taking into account realistically the conditions of implementation, such as large classes, poorly qualified teachers, shortage of trained teachers and lack of facilities.

I have also suggested that centralised control and the hierarchical educational structure in Malaysia is not conducive for the practice of child-centred education which, as I have discussed in Chapter 2, demands that teachers are able to make autonomous decisions. As indicated by the interview data, even when it was decided

that the implementation of KBSR would to some extent be decentralised, teachers and other personnel at the periphery were not able to respond to this positively. They seemed to be shackled by the traditional practice of waiting for directives from the top rather than be able to make independent decisions.

The peculiar socio-political context of Malaysia as a barrier to the effective implementation of KBSR is seen especially in the subject Moral Education. As normally understood, Moral Education encourages independent decision-making based on rational reasons. As taught in Malaysia, however, Moral Education is an alternative to Islamic Religious Education, which is prescriptive in nature. The national ideology of RUKUNEGARA (see Chapter 4 and Appendix 1) declares 'Good Behaviour and Morality' as one of the principles that guide the nation to attain, among other things, 'a greater unity of all her peoples'. As I have pointed out earlier, there is a recognition of the need to establish greater areas of commonality among the various communities. In these circumstances, there is tension within the subject Moral Education, as revealed by the interview data. One of the stated objectives of this subject is to enable pupils 'to advance rational reasons when making decisions..' (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1983a, p.20), and the recommended teaching strategy is open discussions, after which children are asked to make their

own decisions. If this approach were carried out as it should, the teacher's role would be as a facilitator. However, it can be unmistakably deduced from the interview data that the teacher of Moral Education plays a more definitive role as the subject is seen as a regulatory device to produce pupils of good character.

Throughout this thesis I have maintained that understanding of the conceptual apparatuses of KBSR and their implications for classroom learning is vital for KBSR to be successfully implemented. I have been critical of the KBSR orientation course conducted for KPs, and by extension courses for teachers, in which the emphasis was on the practical aspects of KBSR rather than its rationale and philosophy. As we have seen from the interview data, a great deal of misunderstanding of KBSR practices arose precisely because of the failure to appreciate their underlying rationale. But here I must draw attention to the study conducted by Siti Hawa (1986) in which she asked about twenty Year 1 teachers, through interviews and questionnaires, for their views on the extent to which the KBSR course they attended had helped them in the teaching of Bahasa Malaysia and Mathematics. The following are her comments:

The short duration of the course was mentioned by nearly all respondents and was considered as a factor in making it less adequate and less useful. There were many comments on the inadequacy of the contents covered and

the inappropriateness of the techniques used, all reinforcing the same overall impression that the course was 'too theoretical', that 'more details and examples are needed', that 'there should be more of the "how" rather than the "what" and 'more demonstrations rather than explanations are needed.

(Siti Hawa, 1986, pp. 181-182)

It would appear from the above that teachers themselves would favour more of the 'how' and more demonstrations and that they would be more satisfied if the course were less theoretical. This is in direct contrast to my argument for more understanding of KBSR, at least that is the impression one gets at a glance. I would contend that these teachers' preference for more of the 'how' and demonstrations was, in fact, indicative of their unsatisfactory professional training and qualification, that they could begin to think of the 'why' of classroom practices only if they were at a higher level of professionalism. The task of all concerned, therefore, is to raise them to a higher level, not least by enabling them to understand KBSR and be more reflexive. Perhaps it should also be noted that the study I cited above is confined only to the basic skills component of KBSR and does not approach KBSR holistically.

Finally, there is perhaps a more general explanation for why KBSR operates as it does. In the previous chapter I have explained that during the early period of the new curriculum, it was variously referred to as the '3R Curriculum', the '3R System' and the '3R Scheme' by the press, taking their cue from the Education Minister's

original announcement that the new curriculum would emphasize the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. Later the official version 'KBSR' was introduced to dispel the misconception that the new curriculum consisted of only the 3Rs, but public opinion had already been set then by the earlier press coverage of the '3R System'. Though KBSR, as evidenced by its basic documents, expresses the child-centred philosophy of overall development and individual differences, these aspects have not been publicly emphasized. The public conception of KBSR as a 3R curriculum remains, and among the education personnel I interviewed a few referred to KBSR as 'an old wine in a new bottle' and 'going back to the basics'. The fact seems to be that the Cabinet Committee (1979) recommendation for overall development of the child, though incorporated into KBSR, has not been given due emphasis. Indeed, sometimes there is ambivalence on the part of planners, such as over the practices of group teaching and streaming. 'So long as children learn' has at times been forwarded as an acceptable rationale, thus deemphasizing the importance of individual differences. The interview data does not indicate that there has been a fundamental change, so that a dichotomy seems to exist between KBSR as planned and as it has been implemented. I shall attempt to verify this further by examining, in the next chapter, the data gained from classroom observation.

CHAPTER IX

INTO THE CLASSROOM: KBSR IN PRACTICE

1. INTRODUCTION

Classroom observations were carried out in order to get a first-hand knowledge of KBSR as translated into practice in the classroom. As explained earlier (Chapter 7), the observations were conducted in two classrooms, in two different schools, for a period of approximately one month in each classroom. It will be remembered that the two teachers observed were 'good' teachers who were successful implementors of KBSR, that being my specification when I requested for two classrooms to be observed.

In the previous chapter it has been established by an analysis of the interview data that KBSR has met with difficulties in its implementation, in that several participants involved in the change process have not fully understood its theoretical underpinnings or underlying rationale and philosophy. In addition, the interview data indicate that conditions of implementation are far from conducive for the successful implementation of KBSR. This chapter examines the observation data and considers KBSR as practised within the realities of the two classrooms and schools by analysing (a) the fieldnotes written during classroom observations and (b) the fieldnotes of staffroom

and canteen 'talk', written after such encounters but as soon as possible. These are supplemented by data from post-observation interviews with the two teachers and other informal conversations, as they serve to illuminate further how KBSR is practised.

Basically, the question I seek to answer in this chapter is: in what ways, and to what extent, is KBSR implemented in the two classrooms? Given my argument that KBSR is a child-centred curriculum, I shall look for evidence that there has been a shift from traditional to child-centred practices. I shall take each classroom in turn, referring to them as Classroom A in School A and Classroom B in School B, and the two teachers as Mrs. Asraf and Mrs. Basir respectively. Some knowledge of the teachers' background is relevant for, as we shall see later, their stock of knowledge and experiences to a large extent determine their perception of KBSR and their understanding of the teacher's role within its framework. I will therefore begin the following sections on the classrooms by giving a brief biographical sketch or profile of the teachers. Information regarding the teachers' background was obtained not merely during the interviews; indeed a great deal of it was gained during my one-month stay in the respective schools, through informal conversations with the teachers concerned.

Next, in order to find evidences that KBSR has been implemented in the classrooms, it is necessary to construct

an 'ideal type' of KBSR classroom. The conceptual apparatuses of KBSR and its advocated classroom practices have been outlined and discussed in Chapter 6. Based on these concepts and practices, it is possible to interpret that the ideal KBSR classroom will have, broadly, the following descriptive features:

a) The physical environment: generally a stimulating environment with a wide range of resources and materials, reading and other 'corners', exhibits/displays of pictures, charts, models, etc.; desks are arranged in groups.

b) Classroom practices: generally more child-centred than traditional; groupings are not fixed or permanent; the time table is flexible; various instructional activities are carried out, pupils actively involved in the learning process, there is integration of subjects, remediation and enrichment are carried out, there are formative as well as summative evaluations; some elements of choice exist; the teacher acts as a facilitator and guide.

c) Classroom climate: generally a congenial atmosphere - 'open' expression of ideas and feelings, understanding and cooperation, more rewards than punishment, creativity and interests encouraged.

The above features, then, form the analytic categories as I examine the classroom observation data, supplemented by the interview data and other informal conversations with the two teachers.

Then there follows a section which consists of my analysis of 'other observations', these being observations other than those directly connected with the classroom environment, practices and climate, but nevertheless important for our understanding of the implementation of KBSR generally. Some of these observations, for example the financial constraint faced by the schools in implementing KBSR, lend support to the findings of the interview data discussed in the previous chapter. Finally, the concluding part of this chapter looks at the observations in the two classrooms and schools integratively and attempts to provide an explanation for why KBSR operates as it does.

Before I begin the next section, however, I should like to acknowledge in advance the difficulty of interpreting the observation data 'objectively'. I see this as an important methodological issue. As a participant observer in the two schools, it was not easy for me to be completely detached and non-involved when in the classrooms. A participant observer is bound to develop some feelings about the place, the people and the events observed. In my case, it cannot be denied that ^I_I found observation in Classroom A a pleasant experience as I noted the warmth and camaraderie in teacher-

pupil and pupil-pupil interaction. Observation in Classroom B was less enjoyable, though not unpleasant, but I developed a sense of admiration for the very business-like, matter-of-fact way in which the teacher handled her classroom of forty four children. These, then, are some of the feelings I have to keep at bay as I attempt to interpret the observation data objectively.

2. CLASSROOM A

2.1 Teacher Profile

Mrs. Asraf is in her early forties and has been a teacher for the last twenty two years. Like most other Malaysian primary school teachers, her highest academic qualification is the Malaysian School Certificate. Professionally, she was trained to be a teacher at one of the Day Training Centres in 1963-1964. In 1981 she attended an in-service course in Remedial Education at the Specialist Teachers' Training Institute, obtaining a certificate with the highest possible grade of 'Excellence'. She has also attended short courses in Library Science and Educational Technology. As regards KBSR, she was an observer in a ten-day exposure course organized by the CDC. Judging by the number of courses that she has attended, it would be quite fair to say that Mrs. Asraf is an atypical teacher. Most Malaysian primary teachers, like Headteacher A mentioned earlier

(Chapter 8), do not formally increase their professional knowledge after getting their Certificate of Education.

Currently Mrs. Asraf teaches a class of thirty one Year I children. It is a measure of her capability as a teacher that she was asked by the Headteacher to take on a 'problem child' from the next class. This child had been branded as 'bad' in his previous classroom and was disliked by his classmates. His teacher could not cope with him. After a complaint was lodged by the boy's mother, the Headteacher requested Mrs. Asraf to have the boy in her class, even though there were two other Year I classes to choose from. Apparently Mrs. Asraf is coping well with the 'problem child', as his mother has expressed her gratitude to her (Informal Conversation, 17.3.86).

The specialist course on Remedial Education Mrs. Asraf attended five years ago has obviously benefited her a great deal. It made her realize all the mistakes she had made earlier in her teaching career (Informal Conversation, 19.3.86). In her previous school (she was transferred to the present school in January 1986) she was a full-time remedial teacher and enjoyed doing remedial work with 'slow-learners', sent to her from various classes. Her reward, she said, was seeing these children being able to read and sometimes their parents, mainly from the poor squatter areas, would thank her for the good work she had done. In addition to being a remedial teacher, she was also the

teacher in charge of the school library. She described how she designed a layout for the school Library (a classroom) costing \$7,000, canvassed for contribution from parents, and the total donation amassed was double that amount. She also spoke of the Headteacher who was so security-conscious that the school television was kept in his office and no OHP (overhead projector) was allowed to be used in the classrooms. She argued with him regarding the use of these facilities and finally convinced him to relax his control over them (Informal Conversation, 20.3.86). Mrs. Asraf recounted incidents of 'disciplining' in one of the schools she taught previously, such as public caning, and there were occasions when she managed to help some boys from being publicly humiliated (Ibid).

Significantly, Mrs. Asraf's family background and childhood experiences have greatly influenced her conception of the role of the teacher. She comes from a poor family and her father died when she was only two years, leaving five girls to be brought up by an 'uneducated' mother who was, nevertheless, determined to see that her daughters 'get educated'. She recalls how she was shabbily treated by her primary school teacher. She was not allowed to sit for the Special Malay Class entrance examination to qualify to enrol in an English school, on the grounds that her mother was too poor to afford an English school education for her. By a stroke of good luck, an 'officer' at the examination hall

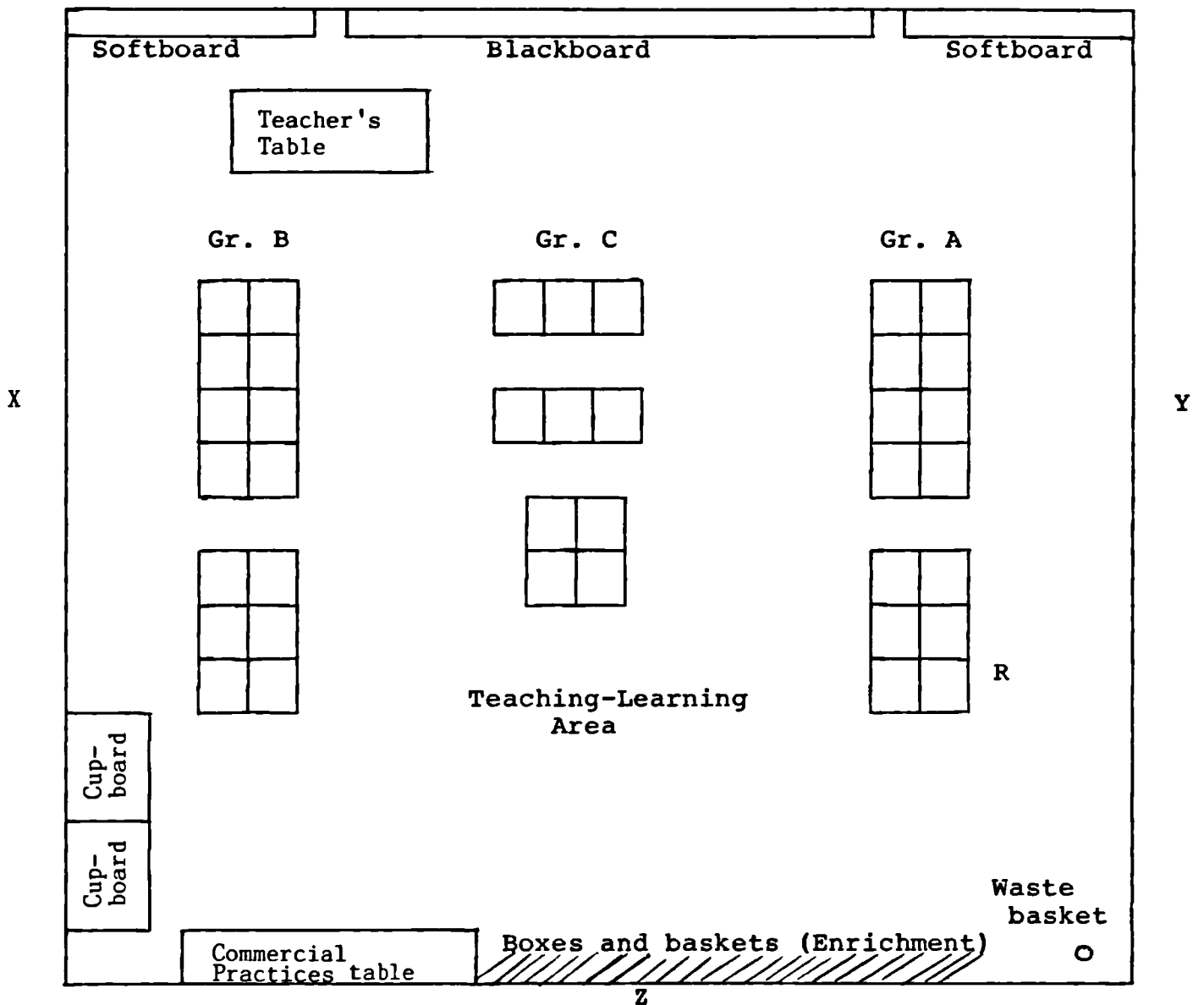
who saw her lurking behind the door invited her to enter the hall, enabling her to take the examination and subsequently she was selected to continue her schooling at St. Mary's (Informal Conversation, 19.3.86). As a teacher, Mrs. Asraf does not believe in being 'too strict' and alienating pupils away from the teacher. She has always been caring towards her children, she says, acknowledging that her attitude towards her pupils is perhaps shaped by the ordeal she went through during her primary school days (Ibid, 2.4.86).

The points that need to be noted from these biographical anecdotes are: (a) Mrs. Asraf is indeed a 'good' teacher as identified by the authorities; and (b) it is not impossible for a Malaysian primary teacher to exercise a degree of autonomy and influence the course of events in the school, provided he/she is backed by additional, post-college professional knowledge, as in the case of Mrs. Asraf.

2.2 The Physical Environment

Classroom A may be described as providing a fairly rich and colourful environment. There are thirty eight desks in the class, arranged into seven groups for the purpose of easy access and movement (see Figure 10). For purposes of teaching, however, Mrs. Asraf considers that her pupils fall into three groups, A, B and C. There is a long softboard on the wall at the rear end of the classroom, full of brightly

Fig. 10: Layout of Classroom A



Note:

1. X and Y - various charts and pictures are pegged on to the window panes here.
2. Z - a softboard along the wall displays charts, syllable cards, alphabets, etc. under subject headings.
3. Teaching-Learning Area - a great deal of teaching and learning activities take place here, with teacher seated on a chair and children seated on mats on the floor.
4. R - Researcher sits here.

coloured charts[†] for Bahasa Malaysia, Mathematics and Moral Education, placed under the appropriate sections or headings. Below the softboard there is an interesting display of alphabets and syllable cards, all hanging from below the board. On the right and left sides of the classroom there are more colourful charts pegged on to window panes. Another two softboards to the right and left of the blackboard in front of the classroom display the class timetable, a calendar and other charts. Across the classroom above the children's heads are strung two wires and to these are pegged on cardboard cuttings of animals and other pieces of art work done by the children. At the rear of the classroom there is a desk on which are placed various items used for buying and selling during Commercial Practices, and along the floor there are many open boxes and baskets containing story books, cards, jigsaw puzzles, and various other enrichment materials. Mrs. Asraf has a cupboard in which she stores her essential teaching materials. The greater part of the materials placed on the Commercial Practices table was brought in by the pupils. This includes soft drink bottles and cans, soap wrappers, toothpaste boxes and various other small, used items. Larger items such as the mats on which children are frequently seated were bought by the teacher.

Judging by the variety of teaching-learning materials available and the colourful display of charts, pictures and

children's art work, it can be said that Classroom A fulfils the KBSR requirement for a stimulating environment.

2.3 Classroom Practices

Grouping. Mrs. Asraf groups her pupils into three, A, B and C, with the weakest group, Group C, placed in the centre. The following is her rationale for placing the weak group in the centre:

I don't want them to feel that they are thrown out [rejected]. If I put them right at the corner of the class, at the end there, they'll feel 'We are really hopeless children, that's why we are here'..... So I'm taking care of their feeling. Another thing, my idea is that the other two groups can help them - maybe they walk over and see that they are not doing it [their work] properly, so they can help them.....
(Interview Conversation in English, 3.5.86)

It is evident from the above data that Mrs. Asraf had taken the children's self-worth into consideration when she decided to place the weak group in the centre. Her concern for the 'feeling' of these children certainly accords with the ideas of educational psychologists who have often pointed out to the relationship between self-worth and school learning (for example, Covington and Beery, 1976). Peer teaching as a strategy in classroom learning is also recognized, as she hopes the brighter children will 'walk over' to help the weaker ones.

The grouping in this classroom is not rigid or unchangeable. Several times I observed Mrs. Asraf asking a

couple of children from Group B to join Group C when she was attending to the latter, doing some remedial work. Presumably she felt that some of the Group B children needed the extra lessons as well. Sometimes children were switched from Group A to Group B and vice versa. Though KBSR groupings are supposed to be based on ability, it appears that ability or achievement is not the only criterion for grouping, especially for Group C. This was revealed to me one day during my classroom observation. Consider the following observation data (fieldnote):

17/3/86 Teacher was attending to Group A at the back but several times she had to turn round to call the names of boys/girls who were 'naughty'/noisy, most of them in Group C. Finally she turned to me and said, 'That's my worst group. Take a look at their work. It's not that they can't do [the work], they are just naughty'. I walked over to the 'worst group'. Indeed they were able to do the exercises given albeit rather untidily.

Needless to say, Venu the 'problem child' is in Group C and is almost always responsible for the disruptions that occur in this group. This practice of assigning the 'naughty' children into the lowest ability group is not uncommon, and has been the focus of several sociological studies of the classroom (for example, see Hargreaves and Woods, 1984).

Individualized/Group/Class teaching. In this classroom class teaching followed by group work are the strategies most often used for language teaching (Bahasa Malaysia) and individualized teaching is extremely rare, occurring only

when remediation is needed. Learning according to ability is put into practice in the teaching of Mathematics. As recorded in my fieldnotes:

17/3/86 Teacher sat on a chair at rear of classroom, with children from Group A seated on the mat in front of her. She did some advance work with this group while Group B and C were asked to do sums from Mathematics cards.

18/3/86 When doing exercises in their Mathematics workbook, the fast learners were allowed to progress ahead and did exercises on pages 73-74, while Group C was doing exercises on pages 40-45.

19/3/86 It was Maths period. Graded materials were used. Each child took a card from a box in the middle of their group, copied the sums down in their exercise books and solved them. The cards were marked A-1 to A-10, B-1 to B-10 and so on, and children worked individually on each card.

26/3/86 Maths. Children did sums from individual cards. Teacher sat next to a boy in Group C and taught him. Even though she was focusing her attention on this child, others came to her every now and then for assistance or explanation whenever they found difficulties, and teacher dealt with them immediately.

Remediation and Enrichment. Remedial activities were carried out almost every day in the basic subjects Bahasa Malaysia and Mathematics for the weakest group. In Mathematics it consisted of much simpler works or exercises than what was done by the rest. In Bahasa Malaysia it was usually a follow-up of class teaching, so that the teacher went over the same thing in a more simplified, step-by-step way, very patiently and often in the form of a game which seemed to make learning more interesting for the slow-learners. I cite below two examples of remedial works carried out in Mrs. Asraf's classroom:

18/3/86 It was 2.50pm. Language lesson and the topic was 'House'. Lots of questions and answers involving the whole class. At 3.10 Groups A and B were asked to get back to their groups to do the exercise on the worksheet as a follow-up of the oral lesson. Teacher retained Group C (eight children), sat on the floor with them, in a circle. Each child was given a pack of alphabet cards and asked to arrange them in alphabetical order.

Teacher: When I mention an alphabet, you show me the card. T..... R.....

Only one of the children was hesitant, the rest able to show the correct cards all the time. From the alphabets Teacher guided pupils to build up the vocabularies used in the lesson earlier.

19/3/86 Remedial work in Maths. Teacher sat on a chair at the back with children from Group C sitting on the floor in front of her. Each of them was given a pack of cards and asked to sort out the cards with numbers from the cards with pictures. Simple mental sums were given, to match numbers with pictures. The children seemed to enjoy this session.

Enrichment activities were never structured. It could be anything so long as it occupied the children's time after they completed their exercises and while the teacher was still engaged in remedial work with the weaker group. It was more of a time-filler. Very often Mrs. Asraf would say: 'Those of you who have finished, place your exercise books here. Go and do some enrichment at the back' (Fieldnote, 17.3.86). Children seemed to enjoy being at the enrichment area, choosing whatever activities they wanted, such as reading a story-book or playing with a mathematical or language game. Mrs. Asraf believed that enrichment activities were for reinforcement as well as 'to make them less bored' (Interview Conversation, 3.5.86).

Evaluation. Continuous evaluation is an important feature of KBSR (see Chapter 6) but there are also the termly, standardized tests to be carried out. The records of continuous evaluation are kept in a large book called the **Rekod Prestasi** (Performance Record) and the records of termly, standardized tests are kept in individual booklets called **Rekod Profil** (Profile Record). The latter is to be taken home by the children after each termly test, to be signed by their parents and subsequently returned to the teacher. Mrs. Asraf expressed the opinion that the **Rekod Prestasi** was more useful than the **Rekod Profil**. She believed in informal evaluation rather than formal testing. Of the formal tests she said, 'I don't think we can really test or assess the child that way'. Rather, she assessed her pupils' progress by conversing with them and checking their daily work. The following is a description of her informal testing procedure:

..... not everyone can do the same thing at the same time, so I call them one by one, converse with them..... sometimes you cannot do it sitting down, with the **Rekod Prestasi** opened in front of you - I find that it does not work. The moment I open my **Rekod Prestasi** the children know and they say, 'Ah, Teacher wants to test us'. So I change my style, I do it informally. I take my **Rekod Prestasi** home - okay, today whom did I talk to. Of course you can't do ten pupils in a day, possibly four or five only. It's up to you, when you feel like doing it [the testing]. When you go home you check: this child he is okay - out of five questions he answered four, so he is okay. That's how I do my testing..... You have to know every child, what are his faults.....

(Interview Conversation in English, 3.5.86)

The timetable. Despite the KBSR recommendation for flexible timetabling, the impossibility of such a practice has been established in the previous chapter through interviews with the implementors. My observation of classroom A confirms this. Subjects such as Music and Religious Education had to be allotted specific times. Art could not be integrated into Bahasa Malaysia because the two subjects were taught by two different teachers. Even Bahasa Malaysia itself became fragmented as some of the periods allocated for it were taken by the relief teacher. The timetable for Classroom A, as found in Mrs. Asraf's Record Book and displayed in the classroom, is shown here in Table 8. The following fieldnote is just one example of how a lesson was interrupted due to the demands of rigid timetabling:

17/3/86 Teacher: Haven't you finished yet?

Pupils : No.....

Teacher: Keep your books first. It's time for Religions and Moral now.

Teacher moved to the adjacent classroom to teach Moral Education, followed by non-Muslim children. Muslim pupils remained in the classroom waiting for Religious Education teacher.

Mrs. Asraf expressed dissatisfaction over the timetable for her class prepared by the administration. She felt that the class teacher herself should decide when to teach Bahasa Malaysia, Mathematics and others. The administration, she said, should allocate only the relief periods such as Music or Religious Education, during which time another teacher

TABLE 8: THE TIMETABLE FOR CLASSROOM A

Time Day	1.10 - 1.40	1.40 - 2.10	2.10 - 2.40	2.40 - 3.10	3.10 - 3.40	R	4.00 - 4.30	4.30 - 5.00	5.00 - 5.30	5.30 - 6.00	6.00 - 6.30
MON	Music	Bah. Mal.	Religion /Moral	Maths	Art Ed.	E	Bah. (Co-Curricular)	Bah. Mal.	Bah.	Mal.	Assembly
TUES	Bah.	Mal.	Religion /Moral	Bah. Mal.	Maths	C	Bah.	Mal.	Maths	Phy. Ed.	Bah. Mal.
WED	Bah.	Mal.	Religion /Moral	Bah. Mal.	Maths	E	Bah.	Mal.	Maths	Phy. Ed.	-
THURS	Bah. Mal.	Music	Religion /Moral	Bah.	Mal.	S	Maths	←	Bah. Mal.	→	-
FRI	-	-	Bah. Mal.	Religion /Moral	Bah. Mal.	S	Maths	Religion /Moral	Bah. Mal.	Art Ed.	-

would take over the class. Her timetable was not conducive for carrying out group teaching. She needed a long stretch of time for Bahasa Malaysia but found the periods for Bahasa Malaysia disjointed. She felt strongly that Art should be integrated with language but the Art Education periods were taken by a relief teacher. However, where possible she tried to make adjustments to the timetable to make it more favourable (Interview Conversation, 3.5.86).

2.4 Classroom Climate

Enjoyable learning. In Classroom A it was obvious that learning was 'fun' and enjoyable most of the time. This may be attributed to Mrs. Asraf's capacity to stimulate the children by devising interesting teaching-learning strategies. A great deal of learning took place through activities that appeared to be games. I cite as an example one such activity which I noted down in my fieldnotes:

17/3/86 Children seemed to enjoy enormously the language game where Teacher placed a word card on the board and children looked for a word card that rhymed with it from their own stock of cards, then placed it on the board. They were so excited, some of them went up to the board to touch the word cards already placed there. Teacher had to restrain them several times. A boy who would not pipe down had to be asked to stand next to the teacher's chair for a while. This game was followed by another activity, almost the same, where Teacher mentioned a syllable and children came up with various words that ended with the syllable, for example:
Teacher: gi
Pupils: bagí, gígí, pagí, pergí.....

It was also obvious that the children enjoyed their Music lesson. I followed them to the Music room one day. They entered the room to the accompaniment of music on the piano played by the Music teacher. Once everybody was inside she struck a chord, which signalled the children into saying 'Good afternoon, Mrs.....' They all sat on the floor, singing one song after another. Sometimes only the girls were asked to sing while the boys clapped their hands in unison, and vice versa. Sometimes they stood up and moved around the room as they enacted the songs they were singing, such as 'I'm a bird....I'm a duck.....'. At the end of the half hour they trooped out of the room to the accompaniment of 'Mary had a little Lamb' played on the piano.

Reward and punishment. There was a great deal more of rewards than punishment in this classroom. Mrs. Asraf frequently praised pupils for their accomplishments, using phrases such as: 'Good, well-done'; 'You read well'; 'You have a good, clear voice'. When she came across a tray of crossword puzzles in which some words had been formed, at the enrichment area, she read out the words, then asked who had arranged the blocks of alphabets. On being told it was Faziah's work, she said, 'You are a clever girl, Faziah' (Fieldnote, 20.3.86).

The punishments meted out to Venu, the problem child, are worthy of note. One day Mrs. Asraf was just leaving the

classroom when Venu was heard shouting. She came back instantly and asked him whether he was a naughty or a good boy (King (1978) has typified such 'no-need-to-answer question' as a verbal form of social control). Venu piped down and sat quietly at his seat. Mrs. Asraf seemed to have succeeded in making him responsible for his own conduct (Fieldnote, 27.3.86). On another occasion, however, the punishment meted out was more severe. Language lesson was in progress. Venu hardly paid any attention, most of the time talking to the new boy next to him. Finally Mrs. Asraf said, 'Venu, go and stand in the corner'. Venu: 'For what?' Teacher: 'Go and stand in the corner and look at the wall' (Fieldnote, 22.4.86). This was a punishment for his misbehaviour which apparently the teacher could not tolerate any more.

'Open' expression of feelings. Spontaneous expression of feelings occurred in this classroom. On one occasion during a Bahasa Malaysia period Mrs. Asraf began by saying that she was going to talk about 'flats'. There was an immediate response from the pupils. One boy said he did not like to live in flats, and the theme was expanded when Mrs. Asraf asked for his reasons. Several others joined in this animated conversation (Fieldnote, 17.3.86). On another occasion a boy expressed his dislike for the subject Religious Education, and had to be coaxed to attend the lesson (Fieldnote, 4.4.86). Some studies have shown that

primary teachers are often 'recipients of much personal information' (Mills, 1980, p.18). Mrs. Asraf was often treated as a confidante by her pupils. She had a wealth of 'stories' told by the children, some of them confidential and even embarrassing.

Choice. By and large the teaching and learning activities in Classroom A were structured, but elements of choice were sometimes discernible. My fieldnotes indicate that at least on two occasions a pupil who preferred to remain in his/her seat rather than joined the rest of the class at the rear of the classroom was allowed to do so. Mrs. Asraf did not impose her will or authority on these two occasions (Fieldnotes, 24.3.86 and 25.3.86). On another day when worksheets were distributed for homework, she remarked that those who could not do the exercises need not do them (Fieldnote, 20.3.86). There seemed to be an option regarding the homework. Choice, of course, existed in the matter of enrichment activities, for children were allowed to choose whatever they liked, limited only by the number of materials available.

Warmth and cooperation. The warm atmosphere in Classroom A seemed to encourage a great deal of positive peer-group interaction - cooperation, sharing and learning from one another were frequent occurrences. Mrs. Asraf never failed to praise correct answers. Sometimes when a wrong answer was given she would say it was 'silap' (an accidental

mistake). In this way children were not afraid to offer answers and at the same time she built up their confidence in learning. Instances of peer support and cooperation can be discerned from the following fieldnotes:

20/3/86 A squabble occurred between Hadi and Aman (both from Group C) over a pencil, with the former accusing Aman of having taken away the pencil that Fanny gave him. Teacher: Don't you have any other pencil, Hadi? At this point Zainal, a boy from another group, came forward and gave Hadi a pencil, whereupon Hadi quietly sat down and proceeded to do his work.

3/4/86 Teacher found it necessary to bring a boy who was sitting in the rear to the front, because he kept coming to the blackboard to look at the words written on it. Teacher sought for the agreement of a girl who sat in front to exchange her seat. She did not summarily direct the girl to give up her seat, preferring instead to explain that perhaps the boy could not see very well.

It can be concluded from the observation data concerning the physical environment, classroom practices and classroom climate - with the most relevant fieldnotes cited in the foregoing pages - that Classroom A has many child-centred features. To the extent that many, though not all, of the recommendations of KBSR have been implemented in this classroom, it may perhaps be considered as an exemplary KBSR classroom. My observation has also established that flexible timetabling, as advocated by KBSR, is indeed impossible to put into practice. Let us now look at Classroom B.

3. CLASSROOM B

3.1 Teacher Profile

Mrs. Basir is a personality quite different from Mrs. Asraf. She is in her late thirties and has been a teacher for the last seventeen years. Like Mrs. Asraf, the highest academic qualification she possesses is the Malaysian School Certificate. Professionally, her teacher-training was at the fully-residential Malay Women Teachers' College (MWTC), which was more established and prestigious than the Day Training Centres. The only in-service course she has attended since leaving College was a KBSR course for Year III. The duration of this course was two weeks and it was conducted by the District Education Office. Thus, unlike Mrs. Asraf, she has not had the benefit of exposure to other courses in the field of education.

Mrs. Basir is currently teaching a KBSR class of forty four children at the level of Year III, in a school described by an official at the Education Office as 'the best primary school in the district' (Interview Conversation, 11.4.86). For the past two years, Mrs. Basir has been given classes which were somewhat neglected the previous year, 'to straighten them up'. She has managed to do it, she says, because she is 'very regimented' (Informal Conversation, 7.5.86). She regards all her pupils as her own children and will punish them if they were naughty

(Ibid). Apparently Mrs. Basir has the reputation of being a strict teacher in the school. By her own admission her daughter, who is a pupil in the same school, does not like to reveal to her friends their relationship, probably because of her reputation. Asked what she meant by being strict, she said, 'I scold my children a lot, but I really don't want them to be afraid of me' (Informal Conversation, 12.5.86).

The Headteacher of School B, previously referred to as Headteacher B, has a high regard for Mrs. Basir, saying she is one of her best teachers and 'there has never been any complaint from parents about her' (Informal Conversation with Headteacher, 22.5.86). And no wonder, for Mrs. Basir's philosophy is that 'one must do one's job as well as one possibly can' (Informal Conversation, 29.5.86). To substantiate this point, she recounted that the previous year she was asked to teach football, so she read up on it and was able to teach it to twelve-year-olds. She added, 'If I were asked to teach Mandarin, tomorrow I'll learn the language to be able to teach it' (Ibid).

Mrs. Basir defines KBSR as 'a new syllabus or curriculum whereby the children should be able to master the 3Rs, reading, writing and arithmetic' (Interview Conversation in English, 30.5.86). She sees mastery of the three basic skills as very important, stressing:

We don't want any dropouts. We want as far as possible everyone should be able to read, write and count..... If they can't read they can't enjoy anything, they can't do anything..... They have to master these three things to go to secondary school or for further studies. (Ibid)

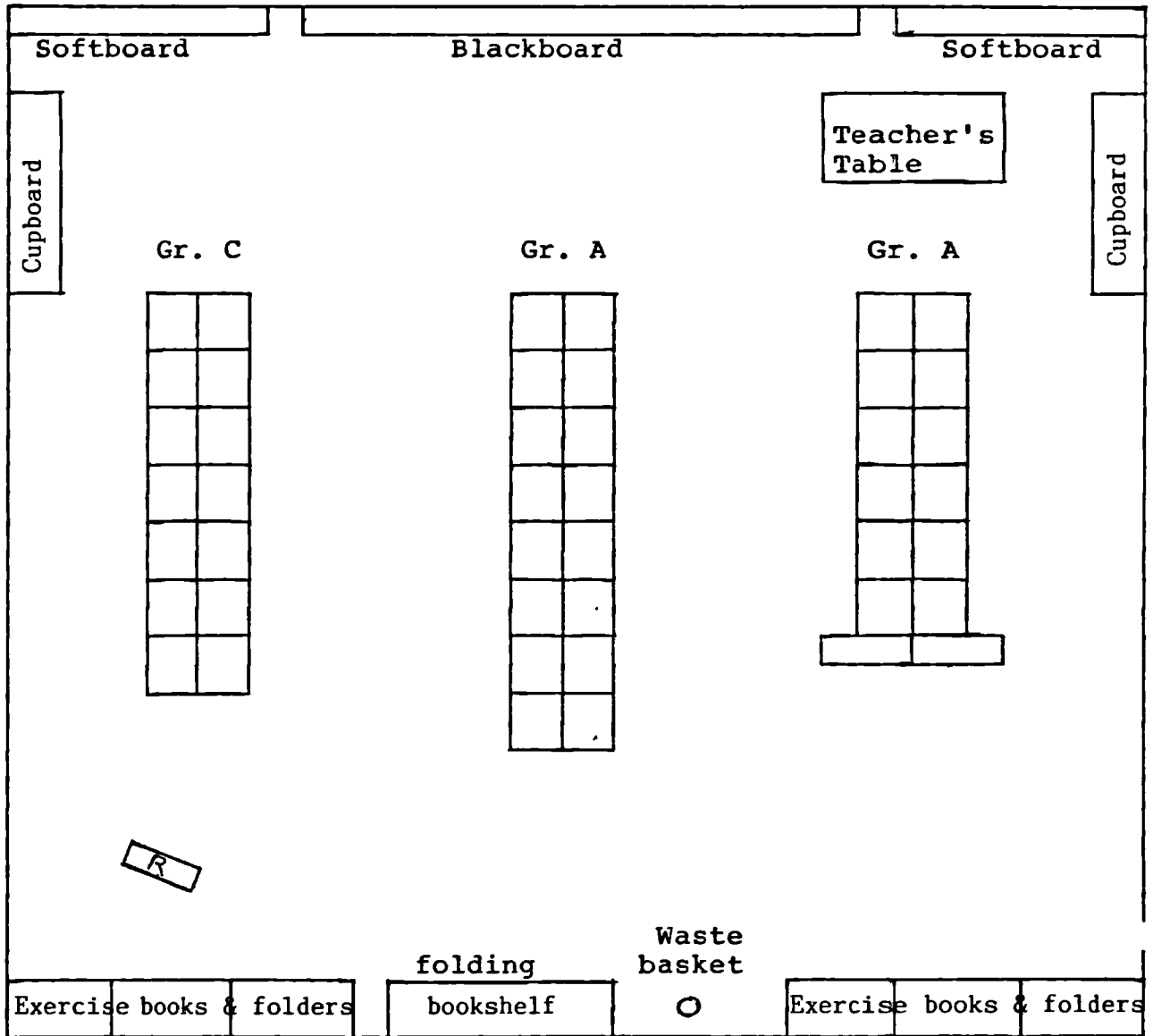
Significantly Mrs. Basir, unlike Mrs. Asraf, comes from a comfortable 'middle-class' home with a titled father. She had an easy childhood and attended good schools in town. She did not know what career to choose after completing her secondary schooling. It was her father who wanted her to be a teacher and advised her to apply for admission into a teacher-training college, saying that she had better do something useful and 'teaching was an appropriate career for a woman' (Informal Conversation, 29.5.86).

The point to note from the above biographical sketch is that Mrs. Basir, like Mrs. Asraf, has also been identified as a 'good' teacher, yet they are dissimilar in many ways. As an equally good teacher, let us examine whether Mrs. Basir has been a successful implementor of KBSR.

3.2 The Physical Environment

Classroom B appears bare and austere when compared to Classroom A discussed earlier. This is one of those classroom^s_k used in the morning as well as afternoon sessions, by a different set of teacher and pupils. The desks in this classroom are arranged into three long groups (see Figure 11). Though physically there are three groups, operationally

Fig. 11: Layout of Classroom B



Note:

R - Researcher observes from this corner.

there are only two. Mrs. Basir considers the first two groups as Groups A; there is no Group B in her classroom, she says, because the children in both these groups are equally 'good'. The 'good' children are in two groups physically to allow for easier movement within the classroom. These two groups are given similar exercises and activities, as they are considered to be of the same level of ability. Unlike Mrs. Asraf, Mrs. Basir assigns the weakest group, Group C, to a position furthest from the doorway as one enters the classroom.

The long blackboard fixed to the wall in front is flanked by a softboard on either side, and on these are found the timetables for the morning and afternoon classes. Underneath the time-tables hang one chart for language and another chart for Mathematics. A cupboard for storage stands at each front corner. A long softboard is found on the wall at the rear, in the middle. There is a display of a few art works done by the children on the desks at one corner, but these belong to the afternoon session and are not the product of Mrs. Basir's pupils.

All in all, Classroom B is quite barren and appears to be the antithesis of the rich classroom environment advocated by KBSR, but Mrs. Basir has her own rationale for the physical set-up in her classroom. For example, the cupboard in which she stores her teaching materials is at the front corner, very close to her table, for the sake of

convenience, while exercise books are placed on the desks at the rear to train the children for responsibility. As she put it,

..... I feel I need the cupboard nearer to me, [since] all my things are inside. And also we must train the children to be more responsible. I have some group leaders, they are very responsible. They arrange exercise books neatly at the back, and files too. I think it is a good setup, convenient to me.....
(Interview Conversation in English 30.5.86)

Unlike Mrs. Asraf, Mrs. Basir has no display or collection of items for use during Commercial Practices, explaining that these items are available in the Resource Centre. More importantly, she is concerned with overcrowding in the classroom: '.....we can't afford the space in this class. We've got a large number of children. My counterpart, the afternoon teacher, has more children. I mustn't take up more space....it's not fair' (Interview Conversation in English, 30.5.86).

The reality of the classroom also leads her to decide against another KBSR recommendation, that of setting up a reading corner, though in this case she does not quite agree that it is a necessity, anyway. Consider the following interview conversation:

Mrs. Basir: We were told to put up a reading corner, but because of the lack of space, when the children take [the class] library books they just bring them to their own places [seats] to read. We can't let them sit in a corner to read.

Researcher: Do you think there's any difference whether they sit at their own places to read or read at a reading corner?

Mrs Basir: I think there's no difference, as long as they read. They like to read. They can take a book and go back to their own places to read quietly. Probably they [the curriculum planners] don't want those who have finished their work to disturb others who haven't. But as long as the class is under control, I feel that they can go back to their own places to read.

(Interview Conversation in English, 30.5.86; emphasis mine)

It is obvious that aside from the problem of lack of space, which genuinely prohibits the partitioning of an overcrowded classroom into 'corners', the reasons for setting up a reading corner as recommended by KBSR have not been fully appreciated. Though one of the basic KBSR documents, the Yellow Book mentioned earlier, devotes several pages to 'Learning Areas', obviously these have not been given adequate attention in the KBSR courses as trainers were more interested in getting teachers to learn how to teach KBSR. To Mrs. Basir, since she is well able to 'control' her class, a reading corner is unnecessary.

3.3 Classroom Practices

Grouping. As mentioned earlier, children in this classroom are grouped into three but operationally there are only two groups as Mrs. Basir categorises the first two groups as Group A, because they are considered to be of the same ability, and the third group as Group C. The children have been in their respective groups since the second week of the

school year, during which time she had identified those who needed to be given extra attention and these were placed in Group C. In addition, the children had 'owned up', when asked, that they were in Group C during the previous school year as well (Informal Conversation, 20.5.86). Questioned whether it is not possible that children could be weak in one subject but are advanced in another, Mrs. Basir agreed but added that

..... my present lot in Group C had been in the same group even during the previous year. So their progress is more or less the same. If they are weak in

↑

Mathematics they are also weak in Bahasa Malaysia. They are generally slower than the rest.

(Interview Conversation in English, 30.5.86)

Group C children, according to Mrs. Basir, are 'from problem homes, lazy, untidy, careless, but they do try hard..... They can do their work but a bit slower' (Informal Conversation, 7.5.86). So her teaching strategy is to give them the same exercises but in lesser quantity, especially in Mathematics. In Bahasa Malaysia, Group A has to copy from worksheets into their exercise books in order to occupy their time, while Group C is expected to do the exercise on the worksheet itself. Mrs. Basir is quite aware that according to KBSR she has to give different exercises to different groups, and that the exercises that she gives to Group A can be given to Group C only when they are ready

for them, but she finds this KBSR recommendation to be impractical. As she put it,

..... But how can I teach them [Group C] three weeks later? That's not practical, so I give them the same thing. So long as they learn, they are all right.....through our experience we know what to do.
(Informal Conversation, 7.5.86)

During my one-month observation in Classroom B, Mrs. Basir's belief that children can be made to learn 'the same thing' at the same time was skilfully put into practice. One clear example was the case of Maria in Group C. I was often told that Maria was 'not a dumb child', that she could do all the work given to her but she never did her homework because she did not have the time, for at home she had to take care of her twin sisters and do the cooking as well (Informal Conversations, 12.5.86 and 20.5.86). In addition, she was often absent from school. By giving her immediate remedial attention at the end of lessons, Mrs. Basir was able to get Maria to 'catch up' with the rest of the children.

Cross-group mobility seems to be possible, as Mrs. Basir says she has 'one or two pupils in mind' whom she thinks 'can go up to Group A'. Likewise she has 'a few in mind' who could be changed from Group A to Group C. But no such changes actually took place during my observation period. Asked on what basis she would 'demote' a child from Group A to Group C, her response was as follows:

Probably these children are just lazy. So when they don't do their work, or they don't pay attention in class, then when you give them work they can't do [it]..... They are not stupid, they are just simply lazy. So I think maybe I should threaten them, they might buck up. The children themselves are much aware that Group C is a slow group, and they'll be afraid to go to Group C. To threaten them might boost them a bit.

(Interview Conversation in English, 30.5.86)

The above data seem to indicate the existence of streaming within the classroom. While KBSR has discouraged streaming of children into different classrooms according to ability as measured by their end-of-year examination performance - which was the normal practice during the old curriculum - and generally encourages mixed-ability children within the same classroom, the practice of streaming seems to persist in a different guise. Labelling of the weak children continues and presumably, in the hands of less discerning teachers, it could very well produce the 'Pygmalion' effect of self-fulfilling prophecy (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968). Interestingly, the 1978 HMI Survey, **Primary Education in England**, has also pointed out that in many instances non-streaming within the basic structure of the school's organization becomes streaming within the confines of the classroom.

Individualized/Group/Class teaching. In Classroom B except for one occasion (on 5th May 1986), instruction in all subjects was inevitably for the whole class, using the same materials and the same methods for all groups, but

Group C was expected to do less exercises when it came to the assignments given. Where group teaching occurred it was actually extra attention given to the weakest group in order to ensure that they reach the same level as the rest or at least were not left behind. I cite from my fieldnotes instances of these:

7/5/86 Bahasa Malaysia lesson. Class teaching - the same worksheet for all children: oral discussion of the pictures in the worksheet, reading the sentences together, filling in the blanks orally. Group A was then asked to do the follow-up exercises in their books, but Teacher went over the same worksheet with Group C, asking them to pronounce the words correctly and to spell them. Only after making sure they understood the exercises to be done were they allowed to go back to their seats and began writing.

6/5/86 Mathematics. Teacher wrote down ten questions on the blackboard and children were to do the sums in their exercise books. Group C, she instructed, were to do only five out of the ten sums. The same materials/degree of difficulty, but less work demanded of Group C.

13/5/86 English lesson. The same worksheet was distributed to all groups after oral lesson, but Group C was to do only one side of the worksheet while Group A was to complete both sides. Less expectation of Group C.

The only instance when differentiated learning took place was noted down in my fieldnotes as follows:

5/5/86 A lesson involving construction of sentences was taught to the whole class orally. As a follow-up children in Group A were asked to do the exercises on the same sheet. But Group C was asked to remain seated in front. Teacher gave them a different sheet, much simpler. She asked them to read the short essay on this sheet, made sure they paused at the right places, checked on their

pronunciations, went over the story with them, then asked them to return to their seats to do the simple exercises as a follow-up. Group C had been given a different exercise, more appropriate for their ability, presumably.

In an informal conversation in the staffroom (7.5.86), Mrs. Basir told me that she disagreed with the KP who told her to provide individual cards for Mathematics. She said it was impossible for her to do so in her class of forty four children. Thus the KBSR recommendation for group teaching and graded materials has not left much mark on the teaching methods carried out in classroom B. Yet Mrs. Basir is an efficient and dedicated teacher, satisfied and secure in the knowledge that whatever her methods, she succeeds in making children 'learn'.

Remediation and Enrichment. Remediation in Classroom B was often carried out immediately and consisted of going over the same lesson for one or a few children whom Mrs. Basir considered to be slower than the rest and were unable to grasp the lesson taught for the whole class. Let me cite a few examples from my fieldnotes:

27/5/86 Teacher dealt with Maria individually after teaching the whole class how to add three figures, such as

$$\begin{array}{r} 236 \\ +175 \\ \hline \hline \end{array}$$

Teacher commented that Maria was the only one who could not understand the Mathematics lesson for the day and this was because she had been

absent for a few days. She went over the whole lesson again with Maria but the same method of 'carry over' was used.

On another occasion (25.5.86) Mrs. Basir gave special attention to three children after a lesson had been taught and the rest of the children had been given exercises to do. She asked them to do some sums on the board, under her watchful eyes, then asked them to return to their seats to do the same sums that others were doing.

During the period of observation, there was no activity which might be called self-enrichment. There appeared to be no time for this as every child was fully occupied with teacher-directed, structured learning hour after hour. Whereas in Classroom A children often occupied themselves with self-chosen reading and other related activities, no such opportunity arose in Classroom B. The books on the folding bookshelf - and they were very limited in number, as the English books were kept locked up in the cupboard (Informal Conversation, 6.5.86) - were hardly read. Only on one occasion was opportunity provided for the pupils to choose a book from this class library if they so wished, and this was on Teacher's Day (16th May, 1986) when the atmosphere in all classrooms throughout the school was more relaxed. One other instance which I might perhaps categorise as providing enrichment activity occurred when Mrs. Basir took her pupil to the library building to watch a video of 'Hansel and Gretel', which appeared to be enjoyed

by the children whose understanding of English was good (Fieldnote, 15.5.86).

Evaluation. Mrs. Basir keeps a **Rekod Prestasi** (Performance Record) and a **Rekod Profil** (Profile Record) of her pupils, just as advocated by KBSR. Of the former she said:

We have the **Rekod Prestasi**, whereby we have to see that each child master each activity [skill] before we go to the next lesson, and if they can't achieve that, we still have to come back and see that they master it by the end of the year.

(Interview Conversation in English, 30.5.86)

Unlike Mrs. Asraf of Classroom A, Mrs. Basir feels that the **Rekod Prestasi** is unnecessary and merely increases the teacher's workload. She believes that the **Rekod Profil**, which records pupils' achievement in each subject at the end of each term through standardised, formal paper and pencil tests, is more useful, and that the standardised tests, are necessary to replace the Standard V Assessment Examination of the old curriculum (Informal Conversation, 29.5.86).

The timetable. As in Classroom A, the timetable for Classroom B is also pre-arranged to allow for relief teachers to enter the classroom at specific periods to teach Music, Physical Education and Art Education. However, there appears to be more flexibility here than in Mrs. Asraf's

classroom. As can be seen from the official time_utable in Mrs. Basir's Record Book and in the classroom (see Table 9), many of the periods for languages and Mathematics are combined in 'Blocks'. Thus they are less fragmented and enable the teacher to do integration. This arrangement is clearly welcomed by Mrs. Basir who says:

I think we have more freedom now to go as much as we like or to minimise our lessons.....The amount we want to teach to the children is up to the teacher..... In a way the curriculum, the syllabus, helps. We are not ruled by the syllabus [timetable] as in the old curriculum, where we had thirty minutes for each subject - thirty minutes of Geography or forty minutes of Mathematics a day and we had to finish within that time. We didn't have integration then. Now we do, so it helps, it helps a lot especially for the slow learners.....
(Interview Conversation in English, 30.5.86)

In this case, then, the slight flexibility in the timetable afforded by KBSR is welcomed by Mrs. Basir who, apparently, found the old curriculum too restrictive, and is able to utilise the freedom given for better teaching.

Rote learning. Memorisation and rote learning seemed to be a daily practice in Classroom B. Every Mathematics lesson began with mental sums, with Mrs. Basir giving questions such as: $42-7$, 6×12 , and so on. The children were to write down the answers in their exercise books, which were then collected to be marked by the teacher. This exercise normally took about five to ten minutes. It was then followed by the children reciting, in chorus: 6, 12, 18..... or 7, 14, 21..... up to 100. During my

TABLE 9: THE TIMETABLE FOR CLASSROOM B

Time Day	7.45 - 8.15	8.15 - 8.45	8.45 - 9.15	9.15 - 9.45	9.45 - 10.15	10.15 - 10.35	10.35 - 11.05	11.05 - 11.35	11.35 - 12.05	12.05 - 12.50
MON	Assembly	Religion /Moral	Maths	← English →	← English →	R E	←	← Bahasa Malaysia →	Bahasa Malaysia	→
TUES	Religion/Moral		Phy. Ed.	← Mathematics →		C	← English →	→	Bahasa Malaysia	
WED	← English →	→	Religion /Moral	Music	Maths	E	←	Bahasa Malaysia	→	
THURS	Co-curricular Activity		English	Maths	Religion /Moral	S	← Bah. Mal. →	→	Art. Ed.	Bah. Mal.
FRI	Phy. Ed.	Bah. Mal.	Religion /Moral	← Maths → (Commercial Practices)		S	English	Music	Writing	-

observation period I did not see any lesson in which understanding of the tables was the focal concern. It is possible, of course, that this had been dealt with earlier, that is before my period of observation. Nevertheless the daily recitation and mental sums, plus the 'carry over' method of addition I noted earlier, seem to me to be features of the traditional method of teaching Mathematics that was practised during the old primary curriculum. In other words, with regard to the teaching of Mathematics, KBSR has not brought about much change in Classroom B.

3.4 Classroom Climate

Mrs. Basir is a disciplinarian. As such, the climate in Classroom B is generally determined by her strict demand for quality work, meticulousness, tidiness and the like. Rule-breaking and untidiness are not tolerated. Thus on several occasions boys who did not tuck in their shirts or had allowed their hair to touch their shirt collar were reprimanded, because the Ministry and School rules clearly specify that shirts must be tucked into trousers, and schoolboys are prohibited from keeping long hair (Professional Circular No. 2/1976).

Mrs. Basir's demand for meticulous work was conveyed to her pupils in many ways. Exhortations that they do their exercises 'properly' were everyday occurrences. For instance, before the children started writing in their

exercise books, she would remind them to write the date and day, to be sure to write each numeral within a square (in Mathematics), and that there must be a distance of two squares between each cluster of numerals. As she went round the classroom to check the children's work, she made sure that they used a ruler to draw any straight line. The following fieldnote is just one example of her meticulous attention to details, a standard which she set on her pupils:

5/5/86 Teacher: I do not want to see any careless work.
You begin a sentence with a?
Pupils: Capital letter.
Teacher: Names of people with a?
Pupils: Capital letter.
Teacher: At the end of a sentence there
must be a?
Pupils: Full stop.

Mrs. Basir's strict demands, coupled with her genuine desire to make every child learn, render the atmosphere in Classroom B less warm and tolerant than in Classroom A. However, though she sometimes appears to be insensitive to the children's feelings, one cannot label her classroom or her teaching tactics as repressive. Let me illustrate by citing two further examples from my fieldnotes:

6/5/86 Bahasa Malaysia period. Children were seated on the floor with Teacher on a chair in front of them. They read together a page from their textbook, followed by questions and answers. Teacher picked on a child who was not paying attention. He hesitated, but finally read the sentence wanted.
Teacher: Next time if you don't know you can sit

outside at the corridor. There you can day-dream the whole day.

13/5/86 Teacher returned children's exercise books by calling out the names of the children. She held out some books, commenting on the neat work done, and exhorted others to do likewise. But the worst work was also made public, as she said: 'Look, this is the work of someone who is lazy. Leela, you didn't even draw the margin!'

Even though Mrs. Basir was authoritarian in many ways, there was no severe punishment meted out. Her public denouncements of some of the children's work were related to her demands for high standards.

There is no doubt that a great deal of learning took place in Classroom B, but most of it involved hard work, very much in the tradition of the old curriculum. Enjoyment of learning - such as the ones noted in Classroom A - was rare. One such occasion took place when Mrs. Basir brought two congkak* boards into the classroom. She had brought the congkak boards because the next Bahasa Malaysia lesson involved a reading passage about this game. A handful of boys who knew how to play the game were allowed to demonstrate it while other children crowded around. It was obvious that the players as well as those who watched enjoyed themselves (Fieldnote, 14.5.86).

* Congkak is a Malay traditional game involving mathematical skill and speed.

Creativity and self-expression. While the KBSR documents urge that opportunities for self-expression be provided and children's creativity is to be nurtured (see Chapter 6), the climate in Classroom B clearly did not cater for such developments. In fact, whether Mrs. Basir realised it or not, creativity seemed to be set aside in favour of conformity. I noted particularly two periods of Co-curricular Activity, during which time Mrs. Basir instructed her pupils to make a model van out of cardboard. The one that she had made was displayed on her table. She provided cardboard cut-outs which the children were to replicate, then she demonstrated how to glue the parts of the van together. I asked her whether children could perhaps be encouraged to create their own models instead of the same model being produced by everybody. Her reply was, 'I think they can't do it on their own' (Fieldnote, 22. 5.86). Thus there was conformity even in Art and Craft.

Classroom Control. Mrs. Basir's control over the children in her classroom was absolute. There was a marked contrast in the behaviour of the children when she was teaching them and when they were being taught by relief teachers, especially trainee teachers. One day the children were very noisy during two periods of English lessons taught by a trainee. When Mrs. Basir came in the following period, there was at once a transformation in the classroom atmosphere - children became subdued and well-behaved. She

reprimanded them: 'I could hear you from downstairs [the staffroom]. Aren't you ashamed of yourselves?' (Fieldnote, 20.5.86). In the staffroom later she told me that she always asked her pupils to sit on the floor in front of her while she was teaching because it was easier 'to keep watch over them that way' (Ibid). There were other tactics used to control the volume of pupil-talk, such as: Mrs. Basir would put a finger to her mouth and say 'sh.....' every time the noise level threatened to rise; whenever children were heard chattering among themselves she would make comments such as 'Who is that telling a grandmother tale?' or 'Whoever is talking, raise your hand'. Such tactics seemed to be successful in keeping down the noise volume and children were able to get on with learning. It is also conceivable that Mrs. Basir's Moral Education lessons - with topics such as 'Being Considerate to others', 'Helping Others' and 'Diligence and Hard Work leads to Success' (Fieldnotes on 7th, 9th and 22nd May 1986, respectively) - had contributed towards her pupils' good behaviour, at least during her presence.

4. OTHER OBSERVATIONS

In the previous chapter it has been noted that implementors generally identify financial constraint as one of the major problems in the implementation of KBSR. My observations in the two schools provide further evidence of this. In school A, apparently there was an acute shortage of the KBSR

guidelines, teaching kits and packages supplied by the Education Department. The Headteacher then assigned one of the teachers to be in charge of these materials and other teachers were to get them from him whenever needed. But this arrangement proved to be too much for the teachers. As Mrs. Asraf explained,

This is not practical for us, because we have to ask for his permission to use [the materials], and sometimes he is not around. And sometimes the teacher given the responsibility of keeping them, he keeps the books, the guidelines, to himself, not sharing them with us. 'Can I have a look at that book?' 'Okay, I'll look for it and give it to you tomorrow'. The next day he forgets. You know, these little things stop you from using the kits, the charts, the books

(Interview Conversation in English, 3.5.86)

In School B, beside the Headteacher informing me that she could not meet her teachers' requests for more blank tapes and transistors, I recorded in my fieldnotes an event which arose out of financial constraint too:

5/5/86 It was just after recess. The bell for the next period had gone and children were proceeding to their respective classes. The Headteacher came hurriedly into the staffroom and asked the teachers to remain there for a while. She spoke to them about the use of stencils and papers, holding out an example of wastage - ten sums on a whole sheet of paper. She cautioned them not to use papers unnecessarily, as the school could not afford to buy any more papers. Someone said that the ten sums on the sheet of paper could be specifically for Group C. The Headteacher reminded them that any sheet distributed must contain exercises for all groups: Group A to do all sections, Group B to do sections B and C and group C to do section C only.

Thus we have here a situation where financial constraint is given paramount consideration and in fact determines the action that this school and teachers ultimately take in the implementation of KBSR. Notwithstanding the KBSR recommendation for teaching-learning materials to be graded according to children's abilities or levels of achievement, it is economical and expedient for teachers to dispense the same exercises for all groups, albeit in lesser quantity for Group C.

The interview data discussed in the previous chapter have also indicated that many personnel at the periphery seemed to be shackled by the traditional practice of waiting for directives rather than make independent decisions, even when some degree of autonomy was given to them. This phenomenon was detected in the classroom as well. I refer in particular to the subject known as Co-curricular Activity, which was introduced only lately into KBSR and has been allotted sixty minutes per week in the time-table. It seems to be a subject in which the teacher has been given a greater freedom to use her discretion and imagination, the only guideline given being that the periods for Co-curricular Activity are to be used for three main activities - uniformed activities (Red Cross, Brownies, etc.), games and recreation. Mrs. Basir had one day used the periods to bring her pupils to the Resource Centre in the library building, to show them a videotape of 'Hansel and Gretel'.

Yet, when I asked her what made her choose that particular activity, she was somewhat defensive, saying:

.....that particular day I just felt like showing them a film, a story that I felt they might enjoy. They have listened to stories, they have told stories, so I think it was a small change for them to watch a story..... Until they [the curriculum planners] provide and tell us exactly what to do, I think we are still free to plan our own activities..... I think I'm quite satisfied with what they have mentioned now..... If they just let us continue our own way, I'll be happy..... I prefer it just as it is now.

(Interview Conversation in English, 30.5.86;
emphasis mine)

It is obvious from the above data that Mrs. Basir enjoyed the freedom given to her in planning and selecting the co-curricular activities appropriate for her class, not ruled by a rigid syllabus. Yet ironically she seemed to expect that there would be more 'prescriptions' or directives from above. Coming from a good teacher, this is perhaps indicative of how the system of top-down curricular directives has become ingrained over the years.

My classroom observations have also established that the classroom teacher is the crucial implementor in the KBSR innovation. In the previous pages when discussing classroom practices I have pointed out to Mrs. Basir's rejection of some KBSR recommendations, such as setting up a reading corner or using graded materials or individual cards for her classroom. Here I want to highlight another instance of non-compliance. KBSR prescribes that one of the Mathematics period per week be used for Commercial Practices - this to

be indicated clearly in the timetable. Mrs. Basir, however, did not adhere to this stipulation. Though the Commercial Practices period was ostensibly found in the timetable for Classroom B (see Table 9), she did not believe in a special period being provided for the subject. Rather, she believed in covering it indirectly during any Mathematics period. In addition, she would be dealing with it, she said, when she covered the topics on currency and monetary units, showing me all the charts that she had prepared in advance of the new textbook which had just been made available (Fieldnote, 29.5.86). These observations indicate conclusively that the classroom teacher could veto or reject any recommendation if she wanted to.

In the previous chapter, the interview data indicate that one unintended outcome of KBSR is that more attention is given to the slow-learners as compared to the fast-learners in the classroom. My observations of practices in the two classrooms tend to support this. In addition, both teachers themselves admit that in their teaching greater attention is paid to the weaker children, but they seem to do so with some doubt and misgivings. Consider the following:

Mrs. Asraf: I don't know whether I'm doing the right thing or not, but normally I give more time to the weak ones, because they need to know - they can't even form words, whereas the rest can even read magazines, so I might as well give them extra work.....

(Interview Conversation in English, 3.5.86)

Mrs. Basir: I think I'm unfair, you know. I always pick on a few pupils who are slow. Because my class is considered an average class [in terms of academic achievement], the children's abilities are more or less

the same, except for those few children who are a bit slow. So I always pick on the slow-learners. The rest can progress at the same rate. The slow learners need more attention, I think.

(Interview Conversation in English, 30.5.86)

It appears, then, that the KBSR emphasis on mastery of the basics - and consequently teachers being held accountable for any child's failure to master the 3Rs - has raised an important ethical problem for the teachers.

Finally, I should like to cite an important, though rather unusual, occurrence in School B which affected the implementation of KBSR. It lends weight to my argument that teacher understanding of KBSR is necessary for its successful implementation. This incident is recorded in my fieldnotes as follows:

29/5/86 In the staffroom during recess. Mr. Abraham complained that he liked teaching English and was an English teacher until recently when he was given Art and Physical Education periods instead. Later on the way to the car park as we were going home, Mrs. Basir told me of how she and two other teachers (all teaching Year III classes) manoeuvred so that Mr. Abraham was relieved of teaching English. The reason was they were unhappy with the slow progress in classes where he was the English teacher: 'In his classes there was too much play and too little learning'. They had persuaded him to believe that he had artistic talents and so he agreed to teach Art Education instead.

It may well be that Mr. Abraham taught English the KBSR way, that is his teaching was activity-oriented. But Mrs. Basir and her colleagues probably preferred straightforward learning of the old-fashioned kind, the way learning takes place in her classroom. But who would have thought that

teacher politics in this manner exist to influence the way KBSR gets implemented?

5. Conclusion

My basic concern during the two-month period of classroom observation was to find out in what ways, and to what extent, KBSR has been implemented in the two classrooms under study. It will be remembered that KBSR aims '.....to ensure the overall development of the pupil.....[which] encompasses the intellectual, spiritual, physical and emotional aspects as well as the development of potential, character, aesthetic and social values' (see Chapter 6). But it has been indicated by the interview data discussed in the previous chapter that there seems to be a dichotomy between KBSR as planned and as it has been implemented, with several of the implementors interviewed emphasizing the basics or 3Rs component of KBSR more than anything else. As it ^rturns out, my observation of the two classrooms has not conclusively established that a dichotomy does indeed exist, yet nor can it be repudiated altogether. Let me explicate these.

The observation data, supplemented by post-observation interviews with the two teachers and other informal conversations, indicate that the two classrooms are markedly different. One might perhaps say that Classroom A is more

KBSRian than Classroom B. To recapitulate, the two classrooms can be distinguished as follows:

Classroom A

In this classroom mastery of the basics as well as overall development of the child have been taken into account. Several, though not all, KBSR recommendations have been implemented: (a) its physical environment is fairly rich, with a colourful display of charts, pictures and children's art works; desks are arranged into groups; and there is a substantial variety of books, word-puzzles and other enrichment materials available. (b) Classroom practices are consistent with those recommended by KBSR - groupings are not static; class and group teaching occur almost alternately while individualized teaching takes place when remediation is necessary; children do progress according to ability especially in Mathematics where individualized cards are often used; remediation and enrichment take place - the latter, being unstructured, offers choices to pupils; formal as well as informal evaluations are carried out; but the timetable, over which Mrs. Asraf expressed dissatisfaction, has not been flexible enough. (c) Classroom climate - learning generally seems to be enjoyed by the children; there is more reward than punishment; spontaneous expressions of

feelings take place; some elements of choice exist; warmth and cooperation are discernible.

Classroom B

Learning seems to be the overriding objective in this classroom. A great deal of learning takes place, but very much in the traditional fashion. Mastery of the basics is given a great deal of emphasis but where other KBSR recommendations are concerned, this classroom leaves much to be desired. Non-compliance with KBSR recommendations can be gauged from: (a) The physical environment - the classroom is comparatively bare, with only a couple of charts on the softboard and very few other materials around; there are no reading or other 'corners'. (b) Classroom practices - groupings are static and in fact represent streaming within the classroom; the teaching strategy employed is invariably whole-class teaching, using the same materials and methods for all groups, and where group teaching occurs this is actually going over the same thing for the weaker pupils; there are no graded materials or individualized cards, even for Mathematics; while remediation is carried out everyday, enrichment activities are rare; rote learning and recitation are daily occurrences. (c) Classroom climate - enjoyment of learning is rare; no provision for

creativity and self-expression; on the whole, a very controlled atmosphere prevails.

Thus, what the observation data give us are two contrasting pictures of the implementation of KBSR in the classroom. While Classroom B corroborates the finding of the interview data that there exists a dichotomy between KBSR as planned and as implemented, the same is not true of Classroom A. The latter has, in fact, to a large extent been successful in implementing KBSR as planned. Given that the two teachers are good teachers, why has KBSR turned out differently in the two classrooms?

Let me attempt some plausible explanations. The two teachers have been identified by the authorities as 'good' teachers and, I must add, their colleagues perceive them to be such. So professional inadequacy, which most of the interviewees have identified as a potential barrier in the successful implementation of KBSR, can be discounted for the moment. My contention is that KBSR turns out differently in the two classrooms because the two teachers have different perception and understanding of KBSR, even though they are both good teachers. At this juncture, I should like to have recourse to the teacher profiles provided earlier on. I made the point that the teachers' perception of KBSR and understanding of their roles within its framework would be determined by their stock of knowledge and experiences. Let us take the teacher profiles in turn and examine how they

have determined their understanding of KBSR and consequently their classroom practices.

Mrs. Asraf of Classroom A, as we have seen earlier, has attended several educational courses after her initial teacher-training. The most significant course attended, undoubtedly, was the six-month specialist course on Remedial Education, for it made her realize all the mistakes she had made earlier in her teaching career (Informal Conversation, 19.3.86). This course, together with her early schooling experience as a disadvantaged pupil, probably shape her professional outlook. When asked what she hoped to achieve in implementing KBSR, or had she experienced some desired changes taking place by virtue of implementing KBSR, the following was her response:

By nature, maybe because of my experience during my school days, I feel what I have achieved is to have the children think of me as a friend. They come to me, they are willing and are not afraid to tell me of my mistakes, they can tell me my faults, sort of give me ideas on what I should or should not do. As it is now they are all very open..... Once I find they are like that, they are warm and friendly towards me..... I feel that is my achievement in class. I don't want them to give me just good work and then [so that] I will love them. I don't want them to be afraid of me.

(Interview Conversation in English, 3.5.86)

Mrs. Asraf said this desired change was happening in her classroom and it could not have taken place during the days of the old curriculum because '.....our time was very limited - thirty minutes for this, thirty minutes for that.

But in KBSR the timetable is more flexible. Let's take Bahasa Malaysia: there's a lot of time to do oral work and activities' (Ibid). It can be seen that Mrs. Asraf does not merely focus on children's learning; she displays a caring for her pupils which, I would contend, is consistent with the KBSR objective of overall development. As her objective coincides with that of KBSR, it is not surprising that many of the KBSR recommendations have been implemented in her classroom.

Mrs. Basir of Classroom B, as we have seen earlier, has not had the benefit of attending post-college professional courses. Thus she does not have the repertoire of professional knowledge earned by Mrs. Asraf. Her technical know-how, if you like, is confined to what she learned during her initial teacher-training and a two-week KBSR course conducted by the District Education Office. The latter, as I have pointed out several times, was probably inadequate in that it informed teachers on how to conduct KBSR but neglected the more important aspect of understanding the rationale and philosophy for the recommended practices. In fact, this inadequacy is clearly reflected in Mrs. Basir's definition of KBSR as 'a new syllabus or curriculum whereby the children should master the 3Rs, reading, writing and arithmetic' (Interview Conversation, 30.5.86). Obviously she has not been made aware that there are aspects other than the 3Rs to be

achieved through KBSR which are equally important. On being asked what desired changes have taken place in her classroom through the implementation of KBSR, her reply was as follows:

During the old system there were children who couldn't read or write when they reached Standard VI, and the syllabus was heavy. And when they couldn't read they couldn't study learning subjects or any other thing for that matter. Now even among my Standard III pupils I don't have anyone who can't read. As least when they go to secondary schools they have mastered the basics, they are okay with their lessons..... I used to have pupils who couldn't even write their names in Standard VI, what more to read.

(Interview Conversation in English, 30.5.86)

Thus her emphasis is entirely on making her pupils literate and numerate. She relies a great deal on her experience, rejecting KBSR approaches which she finds impractical. She employs what she considers to be efficient and sound educational practices, confident in the knowledge that they make children learn. Indeed, many in the education establishment will not deny that she is a good teacher because, as I have said earlier, 'so long as children learn' has often been advanced as the criterion for successful implementation. It is only when one goes back to the philosophy and aims of KBSR, as stated in the relevant

↑ documents, that questions may be raised as to whether Mrs. Basir is successfully implementing it, for then it will be apparent that a dichotomy exists between KBSR as planned and

as implemented in Classroom B. This brings us back to the question of professional inadequacy. It is not that the dedicated, efficient and hard-working Mrs. Basir is inadequate as a person or teacher. The point to be emphasized, as I have done over and over again, is that a clear understanding of KBSR - appreciating its philosophy and aims and the rationale for its recommended practices - is necessary for its successful implementation. Professional inadequacy, in this sense, has been created by an implementation strategy in which implementors are given short, exposure courses on how to teach KBSR at the expense of a deeper understanding of its child-centred rationale-philosophy.

In addition, I should like to point out another dimension that may have contributed to the dichotomy in Classroom B. Even if Mrs. Basir were knowledgeable about child-centredness, this in itself does not guarantee that she would implement child-centred practices. As we have seen, Mrs. Basir does not wilfully resist or rejects the practices recommended by KBSR; in fact she has quite valid reasons for doing so. Thus, she does not have reading or other corners because the classroom is already crowded with her forty four children, while the teacher who has the same classroom in the afternoon session has more pupils. She does not carry out group teaching because it is not 'practical', and individualized cards are 'impossible' in her large class.

Her teaching styles, then, are a response to the institutional constraints that she faces. They are in fact her survival or 'coping strategies' (Hargreaves, 1984). It is important to note that many of the classroom practices recommended by KBSR necessitate smaller class sizes and adequate provision of resources. These are conditions of possibility, without which it is all too easy for the classroom teacher to stick to experience and teaching strategies which have in the past proved to be 'effective'.

This research has looked at only two classrooms, taught by two good teachers. There is perhaps no ground to generalize the findings from observations in these two classrooms to other classrooms across the nation (but cf. Stake, 1978). I would, however, speculate that since Mrs. Asraf is an atypical teacher, it is most likely that other good teachers are implementing KBSR the way it has been implemented by Mrs. Basir in Classroom B. In other words, the dichotomy that we have seen may well be a widespread phenomenon. The fate of KBSR in the hands of mediocre and poor teachers is, of course, an issue appropriate for another research. Here what is most significant is that through the classroom observations this research has furnished evidences that there are indeed several difficulties in the implementation of KBSR, ranging from deficient teacher preparation, and therefore professional inadequacy and lack of understanding, to institutional and

financial constraints. It is apparent that the success of a curriculum intervention depends not only on the teacher's expertise and understanding but also, and equally important, on the context provided, such as the size of the class and classroom, the resource materials available, the compatibility of the curriculum with the general climate of the school and so on.

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

1. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

KBSR, the New Primary School Curriculum in Malaysia, has been investigated in this study on the proposition that - as a curriculum which responds to the Cabinet Committee (1979) recommendation for 'overall development' - it is an innovation which seeks to introduce a form of child-centred curriculum as compared to the old, traditional, academic curriculum. I have argued that such a change departs greatly from past curriculum renewal projects with which the Malaysian school system and education personnel were familiar. It is in a sense an 'overhaul' of the primary school curriculum, in that it attempts to implement not merely a superficial change related to classroom practices but involves a fundamental change : a child-centred curriculum is premised on philosophical-pedagogical assumptions very different from the traditional curriculum.

It was further proposed that conditions in Malaysia were not conducive to such a change, that there were several factors which acted as barriers, and that therefore KBSR was most likely to meet with difficulties. Among these factors were: the lack of training and professionalism among Malaysian education personnel generally; the hasty implementation of KBSR and its implication for 'crash'

orientation programmes for the participants involved in the change; centralised control and the hierarchical organizational structure of education in Malaysia; and the peculiar social and political climate of Malaysia with its overriding objective of achieving national unity and integration among its multi-ethnic population. The Malaysian socio-political and educational contexts (Chapter IV) were explored to support these propositions.

With regard to the more specific context of KBSR, I have outlined the role of the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) in providing the infrastructure for curriculum development, reviewed some past curriculum projects and considered the conditions that led to pressure for change in the primary curriculum. The review of a few previous primary curriculum projects furnished evidence that these had included attempts to introduce child-centred elements such as integrating the primary curriculum, more active pupil participation and inquiry-based teaching-learning. These attempts did not succeed largely because of teacher inadequacy to meet the demands expected of them. There was even a 'remedial' curriculum project to aid and support the teachers but again this did not prove successful. All these projects followed, more or less, the RDD paradigm of planned change and were centre-periphery in nature. Evaluators and analysts of these projects have cited this procedure of change as one of the factors contributing

to their failure, because it meant that teachers were not personally involved and therefore tended to be detached and non-committal. However, the Ministry position regarding curriculum development and change remains the same, because of the importance placed on centralised control in the effort to use education as an apparatus to achieve national unity. Further, it has been rationalised that it provides an efficient and economic use of scarce resources and expertise. While agreeing that these are important reasons, I have further argued that the RDD paradigm, despite its several deficiencies, is the only feasible alternative for Malaysia at present if change is to occur at all. So long as teachers are not adequately trained - and by this I mean not only showing them the skills of teaching, the 'how to', but also enabling them to acquire curricular understanding and reflexivity - they will not be professional enough to even begin to think of initiating any change. In other words, school-based curriculum development or 'school-centred innovations' (Hargreaves, 1982) such as those currently favoured in the western world are simply out of the question presently. Besides, there exists no reward structure for extra effort, initiative and improved performance among primary teachers.

I then examined KBSR with regard to its initial formulations, its curricular framework and some of its implementation strategies by analysing the relevant

documents. These revealed some interesting features, including some anomalies. It would appear that when the Minister of Education made the announcement in December 1980 that a new primary curriculum would be tried out in 1982 and implemented nation-wide in 1983, there was no official blueprint as yet with regard to the form and substance of the new curriculum. The ministerial announcement, in fact, started the ball rolling, and curriculum officers were undoubtedly under a great deal of pressure to 'deliver the goods'. They had as their guidelines the Cabinet Committee (1979) recommendations, and no doubt their experience of past curriculum development projects was useful.

Initially the proposed new curriculum, as expressed by the press statement made by the Education Minister, showed an overwhelming concern for mastery of the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic and this was welcomed by the public, given that the problem to be redressed was illiteracy and under-achievement generally. For quite some time it was referred to as the 3R curriculum or the 3R system. At the initial stage, 'the development of the child's potential' as a component of overall development mentioned in the Cabinet Committee recommendation seemed to be given little attention. However, a discussion paper tendered by the CDC about a month after the ministerial announcement, entitled 'General Education for Schools in Malaysia - A Proposal', took into consideration this

component as well as the basics component when it stated as its first principle that education must produce a balanced individual who experiences overall development physically, intellectually and emotionally. This paper seemed to give substance to the cabinet recommendation with its proposal that the new curriculum be based on 'pupil characteristics' such as individual differences, providing compensatory and remedial education, developing the child's potential and interests, providing suitable and relevant experiences and so on. These, I have maintained, are child-centred concerns. At the same time I have drawn attention to statements in the Paper referring to the need and aspirations of the nation, the societal ends of education. I advanced the thesis that the individual and societal ends of education in Malaysia may at times be incompatible.

In any case, the Paper was accepted and became the basis for the development of KBSR. I have examined the philosophy and aims of KBSR, its areas of study, its recommended teaching and learning strategies and the role of the teacher within its framework. Consistent with the paper on General Education from which it ensued, analysis of the KBSR documents confirmed that it is child-centred in nature. Again I have highlighted instances where there appears to be a possible contradiction, such as in the subject Moral Education, where rational decision-making is placed side by side with conforming to the values of the community and

society. I have also examined the implementation strategies of KBSR. The most striking feature of the dissemination of KBSR is not that the participants or implementors were given short orientation courses, but that the theoretical aspects of KBSR, its rationale and philosophy, were given scant attention. Courses held invariably focused on the practical aspects of implementing KBSR. Given my argument that overall development is a new and 'foreign' concept to most Malaysian education personnel, and that KBSR as an innovation demands a fundamental change involving not only classroom practices but also an understanding of the philosophical-pedagogical assumptions underlying these practices, my conclusion was that there had been a serious oversight in the dissemination strategy.

My empirical research, then, took a closer look at KBSR. Interviews were conducted primarily to elicit the understanding and perception of the various actors involved in the change process - their understanding and perception of the conceptual apparatuses of KBSR and their implications for classroom practices. In addition, I was also interested in the problems of implementation as anticipated by the planners and as actually encountered by the implementors. Rich, varied and detailed data were collected through the unstructured interviews. The data reveal that many of the actors involved in this curriculum change - whether at the centre, midway or periphery - do not fully comprehend the

conceptual apparatuses. On the whole, personnel who have had an earlier initiation into child-centred education, such as through attending courses abroad, have a deeper understanding of KBSR. Several newly-introduced concepts and practices have been misunderstood or confused, such as : overall development, group teaching, integration of subjects, remediation/enrichment, the inquiry method and streaming/non-streaming. Generally there is a superficial understanding of the recommended KBSR practices, with many interviewees unable to give the rationale underlying them. In addition, problems of implementation as encountered by the implementors far exceed those anticipated by the planners. It can fairly be summarised that, all in all, the interview data have supported my proposition that KBSR would meet with difficulties. Judging by the interview data only, no fundamental change has taken place and it would appear that a dichotomy exists between KBSR as planned and as implemented.

Classroom observations were carried out in two classrooms taught by 'good' teachers in two different schools, for a period of approximately one month in each classroom. The idea was to get a first-hand knowledge of how, and to what extent, KBSR was implemented within the day-to-day realities of the classroom. The observation data in fact neither fully confirm nor reject the plan-implementation dichotomy I stated above. In Classroom A KBSR has been implemented

almost as it was designed to be, while in Classroom B there has been less compliance with the recommended KBSR practices. Given that the teachers are both 'good', why is one classroom more KBSRian than the other? One obvious explanation is that there are less pupils in Classroom A, with thirty one children as compared to Classroom B with forty four children. It is easier to do group teaching, provide graded materials and so on with a smaller number of pupils. However, I have also attributed the more successful implementation of KBSR in Classroom A to the teacher's personality and greater understanding of child-centred education, for she has attended several post-college courses, whereas the teacher in Classroom B has attended only one KBSR exposure course - a course which leaves much to be desired in enabling teachers to understand the underlying philosophy and rationale of KBSR. Informal conversation and post-observation interviews with the two teachers confirmed that the teacher in Classroom A had a greater understanding of child-centredness and was personally committed to its principles and practices. The teacher in Classroom B, on the other hand, often dismissed the recommended KBSR practices as impractical and favoured her own experience of 'making children learn'. A great deal of cognitive learning took place in her classroom but little of the warmth, cooperation, camaraderie and openness observed in Classroom A was present in her classroom

climate.

Based on the documentary analysis, interviews and classroom observations that I have carried out, I would conclude that the difficulties inherent within KBSR and implicating its implementation may be summarised and tentatively explained as follows :

Objectives, Philosophy and Concepts

The cabinet recommendation for change in the primary curriculum had called for overall development of the child, encompassing aspects of basic education as well as the development of the child's potential (Recommendation 55). It would appear that the meaning of 'overall development' has not been deliberated at length and given sufficient attention. While the objectives to be achieved through KBSR may be clear in the minds of some of the planners, such clarity has not been transmitted fully to the implementors. What comes through as crucial in the minds of implementors generally is the objective of mastery of the basics, at the expense of the other objective of developing the child's potential. The philosophy of overall development and child-centred education expressed in the basic documents of KBSR remains a rhetoric. What implementors care about is to ensure that every child will be literate and numerate. Thus there is an overemphasis on mastery of the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, and therefore cognitive

learning, which may bring Malaysian primary education back to where it was before the introduction of KBSR.

Indeed, what constitutes overall development and who defines it? In fact, what is the meaning of basic education? This latter term has been interpreted differently by different people in different countries (see, for example, Hawes, 1979). The Cabinet Committee Report defines basic education as 'an education in which the curriculum emphasizes skills which will assist the child to function more effectively in life after primary education' and contrasts it with general education which is defined as 'an education in which the curriculum emphasizes academic characteristics' (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1979a, p.18), and calls for a replacement of the latter by the former (Ibid, Recommendation 2). It seems an anomaly, therefore, that KBSR had its genesis in a paper which was a proposal for general education, and later appeared as it did with a curricular framework advocating child-centred ideology and practices. A possible explanation is that KBSR was developed by western-trained personnel familiar with child-centred concepts and trends in education such as individualized teaching and learning, inquiry methods and integrated curriculum. In terms of dependency theories, it is perhaps possible to say that it is a symptom of the cultural imperialism experienced in most ex-colonised countries (Altbach and Kelly, 1978).

However, the 'foreignness' of these concepts have not been given due recognition and particularly attended to in training courses, resulting in the failure of most participants in the change process to understand these concepts. Perhaps unwittingly, overall development as an aim has been less emphasized than mastery of the basic skills, and certainly it was not explicitly stated to the general public. The benefit derived from this, possibly, was that it minimised the threat of change to implementors, especially the teachers who would have to adopt unfamiliar patterns of teaching. In addition, conflicts with the conservative forces of society - who most certainly would question, for example, the value of individuality over conformity - were avoided.

Conditions of Implementation

It is not unusual for coercive methods of implementation to be employed in centralised educational systems. In the case of KBSR, once the Education Minister had officially announced the date for implementing the new curriculum there was really no turning back. It was widely recognized that KBSR was hastily implemented. Education officers were unable to withstand pressure from the top and could only 'try to do our best'. In these circumstances, what they produced within a short time can be described as remarkable. It is clear, however, that KBSR had not been well thought-

out in terms of the conditions of implementation.

The empirical data I collected provide several examples of the way in which KBSR was constrained by its conditions of implementation. Thus, while teachers' professional inadequacy was widely acknowledged, measures to overcome this were hardly sufficient. The short exposure courses conducted for them were predicated on the assumption that it would be sufficient to explain the content of KBSR and how to teach it; there was little attempt to enable them to understand its rationale and philosophy which, I believe, was necessary to get the teachers' commitment to a child-centred pedagogy. The KPs, who were selected from amongst experienced primary teachers and were entrusted with training teachers and visiting them in schools, were given similar courses, only earlier. Many teachers questioned their 'superior' expertise, thus making the value of their services doubtful (cf. Sussmann, 1977).

During the planning stage, the developers recognized that the teaching-learning strategies advocated in KBSR would work best in classrooms of not more than thirty. But it turned out that there was an acute shortage of primary teachers, because the Teacher Education Division had extended its training programme from two years to three years beginning with the intake of trainees in 1981. Thus there was a mismatch of supply and demand. Class sizes remained large and, in addition, many untrained temporary

teachers were employed.

The empirical data also indicate that the financial requirements for implementing KBSR were grossly underestimated. It was assumed that the allocation of M\$5,000 per school per year for six years would be adequate. The result was a shortage of materials in schools - the two teachers observed often used their own cash to buy materials for classroom use. At the district level administrators complained of shortage of funds to conduct KBSR courses, and this problem also forced them to cut down on the number of school visits that KPs could make.

The findings of this study with regard to the problems of implementing KBSR are, of course, nothing new. They confirm much of what is already known about the process of implementing a new curriculum. The general literature indicate that similar problems arise when change is introduced, whatever the cultural and learning milieu (see, for example, Adams and Chen, 1981; Fullan, 1982; Hurst, 1983). Specifically with regard to Malaysia, studies of curriculum change have been carried out by Lewin (1981), Napsiah (1983) and Siti Hawa (1986), who examined different cases but invariably there are similarities in their findings.

2. IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study confirm that KBSR has met with difficulties. Several problems have been identified. In this section I shall discuss the implications of the study, leading to some recommendations, under appropriate headings.

Teacher Education

It is clear from the study that a serious problem in the implementation of KBSR is a lack of understanding of its philosophy and the rationale underlying its recommended classroom practices, on the part of teachers and other participants in the change process. Particularly with regard to teachers, the crucial role that they play in the implementation of any curriculum innovation has been demonstrated by several studies (for example, Reid and Walker, 1975). Malaysian curriculum developers have geerally accepted this as a fact, but the measures taken in the development of KBSR had emphasized the production of teacher's guides and other materials at the centre, assuming - true to the RDD model - that the teacher is a passive consumer at the end of the line ready to put into practice the KBSR recommendations and to utilise its products. As my data reveal, this assumption is faulty for several reasons : in some instances the materials did not even reach the schools, or there was only one copy or one unit to be shared by many teachers, or the headteacher would

store the materials in his room. More significantly, the classroom teacher implements or rejects the KBSR recommendations based on her view of its practicality. The implication is that teacher commitment to an innovation is an essential element for its implementation. I have argued that such commitment can only be acquired through an appreciation of the rationale and philosophy of the changes introduced. An implementation strategy that focuses on getting teachers to attend short, orientation courses, mainly explaining or demonstrating to them how to conduct the recommended classroom practices, is not likely to lead to teacher commitment towards KBSR. This raises a whole issue concerning teacher training. Raising the level of training and professionalism of teachers is, I feel, the first necessary step in the direction of improving the quality of primary education in Malaysia. I shall attempt to spell this out below.

It is most unfortunate that there is a tendency among educational planners not to recognize that the quality of school experience is affected by the quality of its teaching staff. In the past, studies such as those conducted by Coleman (1966) and economic analyses have led to the conclusion that investments in teacher training was a doubtful proposition if the objective was to improve the quality of instruction. The World Bank Education Sector Paper (IBRD, 1974), for instance, reflected such a view

when it played down the worthwhileness of investing in teacher training in Third World countries. However, Professor Husen's analysis of thirty two relevant empirical studies conducted in developing countries has demonstrated that teacher training does have an effect on pupil performances (Husen, 1979). As such, there is a case for reassessing the policy in which investment in teacher training is minimal compared to the allocation for material resources.

In the case of Malaysia, the introduction of a sophisticated curriculum such as KBSR underlines the importance of recognizing that material provision, even if it were adequate, is not a sufficient condition for the successful implementation of an innovation. Even more important is the preparation of the teachers who, ultimately, translate the curricular recommendations into classroom practices. It has been demonstrated by the findings of this study that short, in-service courses aimed at 'orienting' teachers to a fundamental curriculum change, but with an emphasis merely on the practical aspects of the change, are not very effective - teachers generally do not fully comprehend the underlying rationale-philosophy of the recommended KBSR practices and this has led to a non-committal attitude towards their implementation. The implication is that alternative strategies have to be found in order that all teachers who implement KBSR acquire a

clear understanding of its rationale and philosophy and appreciate their role within its framework. At this point I should like to reiterate the view I expressed earlier - that it is necessary to raise the level of training and professionalism of the teachers in order to improve the quality of primary education in Malaysia. My recommendations with regard to teacher education, therefore, will not be confined to suggestions of solving the immediate problems of KBSR only, but will look at teacher education in the long term as well.

In the short term, the need is to enable teachers who are presently teaching KBSR to implement it as a curriculum which takes into consideration the overall development of the child rather than emphasizing only its basics component. KBSR is now in its fourth year of implementation, which means that the teachers involved in teaching Year I to Year IV have all been exposed to short KBSR orientation courses. In view of the inadequacy of such a course, as indicated by my findings, I would suggest that the Ministry of Education recall these teachers for a refresher course during the school vacation. This refresher course should cover

- lectures and discussions aimed at improving the teachers' general understanding of KBSR, especially its rationale and philosophy and the philosophical-pedagogical assumptions underlying its recommended

classroom practices.

- exercises in self-evaluation : What have they achieved in implementing KBSR? In what ways are their classrooms/pupils different from the days of the old curriculum?
- group discussions which provide participants with the opportunity to share their past experiences in implementing KBSR, their success and failure.
- demonstrations of producing teaching-learning materials and audio-visual aids which have been found to be particularly useful.
- film shows, followed by discussions, on successful primary school practices in other countries.
- other sessions aimed at encouraging general curricular awareness and reflexivity.

In the long term, in the interest of improving the quality of teaching the Ministry should, first of all, introduce a more stringent system of selecting teacher-trainees. In this respect, the recent development of aptitude tests by the Teacher Education Division and interviews of prospective teacher-trainees are steps in the right direction. Once they have been admitted into teacher training colleges, it cannot be overemphasized that the college curriculum must include not only the knowledge and

skills of teaching but also fosters greater curricular understanding and reflexivity. In the past, methods lecturers in training colleges have emphasized the teaching skills necessary for teaching particular subjects, based on the school syllabuses for mathematics, science and so on. What is important now is to foster curricular understanding across subjects. In other words, it is necessary for education lecturers and lecturers of particular subject areas to conceptualise a different orientation towards teacher education and to collaborate in order that teacher trainees have a deeper curricular understanding and insight of the intricacies of teaching.

Initial teacher training must be supplemented by properly-planned in-service courses to keep teachers up-to-date. In the in-service courses, I would suggest that a balance between theory and practice, involving demonstration as well as discussion of the underlying principles of recommended classroom practices, would be appropriate as it would make practising teachers more receptive to suggestions. In addition, teachers who actively participate in the demonstration and discussion will have the personal satisfaction of having contributed significantly - no small achievement in a system traditionally marked by directives from the top. The Ministry should also consider creating a reward structure as a recognition of the value of attending in-service courses; for example, such courses should lead to

upgrading and consequently improved promotion prospects for the teachers.

Husen has criticised the teacher training system in developing countries as 'the most rigid and conservative part of a national education system' (Husen, 1979, p.33). This is quite true of Malaysia, where there is a dual system of teacher training : the universities produce graduate teachers for upper secondary classes, while primary teachers are trained by the teacher-training colleges. Be that as it may, I would suggest that it is not too early to begin to think of modifying this dual system. In the past, the number of graduates who joined the teaching profession was small and they were spread out in upper secondary classes, but now the demand for graduates in secondary schools is almost saturated, especially in the science subjects. On top of that, due to the economic recession a large number of graduates are currently looking for employment - in September 1987 there were 4,460 unemployed graduates registered with the Labour Ministry. In view of the shortage of teachers at the primary level, and in the interest of raising the standard of teacher professionalism, graduates should not be confined to teaching in the upper levels of secondary schools. Furthermore, since the success of training programmes partly depends on previous general education, there is a case for producing graduate teachers for primary schools. The Ministry should therefore devise a

teacher education programme suitable for degree-holders who are interested in teaching in primary schools.

Other Professional Development Programmes

Support services for teachers implementing change is widely recognized as important. In the case of KBSR, the empirical data indicate that many of the personnel involved in providing guidance and supervision to the teachers were themselves professionally inadequate. The implication is that there has to be a concerted programme of professional development for them as well. Let me take, first of all, the headteachers - those personnel directly in contact with the teachers who implement KBSR. Several studies have demonstrated that the active involvement of the headteacher or principal is necessary for change to be successfully implemented, and that the degree of implementation of an innovation is different in different schools because of the actions and concerns of the school principal (Fullan, 1982). It cannot be denied, then, that the headteacher has a crucial role to play in the change process. However, my empirical data indicate that there are headteachers who know very little about KBSR, such as Headteacher A who had not attended any formal course concerning it prior to his promotion from an ordinary teacher to a headteacher. Even though one of the Ministrys' implementation strategies was conducting a short 'exposure' course for headteachers, it is

not certain whether they have all benefited from it. I would suggest that greater attention be paid to the fact that headteachers exercise a powerful influence on the implementation of an innovation, by ensuring that every headteacher attends a KBSR course aimed at a thorough understanding of the new curriculum, plus an appreciation of his or her role as a professional and instructional leader. The Ministry should also consider providing opportunities for headteachers to meet regularly to discuss common problems.

Next to the headteachers many of the KPs (Key Personnel), whose responsibilities include visiting teachers in schools to provide them with support and guidance, were also found to be professionally inadequate. A great deal of their inadequacy can be traced to the KP course they attended, which emphasized the practical aspects of implementing KBSR at the expense of understanding its rationale-philosophy. This suggests that there need to be a re-orientation of the KP course to enable the KPs to acquire a clearer understanding of KBSR. In addition, the KPs must be selected from among the best teachers in order that they will be able to demonstrate their 'expertise'; without such a qualification all too often the classroom teachers question their credibility.

At the district level, it is necessary that all administrators involved in the implementation of curriculum

change have a clear understanding of it. Failure to ensure this, as we have seen in the case of KBSR, is detrimental to the curriculum as some of their misconceptions are passed on to teachers. At the national level, teacher educators and especially inspectors of schools need to be updated with regard to their knowledge of educational theories and practices. It is important, for example, that they come to terms with the integration of subjects as conceptualised in KBSR and cease to lay emphasis on their own specialised areas only. The implication is that some programme of professional development need to be devised for the education personnel at the district and national levels.

Finally, it is noteworthy that several studies have shown that the degree of change among teachers is strongly related to the extent to which teachers interact (Fullan, 1982). This suggests that the authorities should establish conditions for teachers to interact, such as by the setting up of teacher centres at district levels.

The recommendations that I have made concerning the education of teachers and other professional development programmes will, of course, need a great deal of financial allocation in order to be implemented, but this should not deter the authorities. The fund necessary has to be found if improving the quality of primary education is indeed one of our top priorities, for there is ample evidence that a fundamental change is not likely to occur where the actors

involved are professionally inadequate and non-committal.

Strategies for Curriculum Change

It is important to recognize that curriculum change is a very complex process involving several components, all of which have to be thoroughly analysed and deliberated before the change is introduced. In Malaysia, curriculum changes can be conceived of as solutions to problems. In the case of KBSR, the problems identified were illiteracy and under-achievement among many primary school children, and these problems were traced to the overloaded academic curriculum, the examination-oriented school system, compartmentalisation of subjects and so on. KBSR, therefore, was developed to solve these problems by introducing a curriculum for overall development. But it has not been rationalised or explicitly stated why or how such an innovation was deemed a suitable solution to the problems identified. There seems to be a lack of clarity regarding the underlying logic for change here, among planners and therefore implementors as well. In addition, the new concepts introduced were not given adequate exposition. All these led to a superficial understanding of KBSR among the implementors, so that the 'non-basics' aspects of the curriculum were less likely to be implemented. The implication is that curriculum planners need to be more wary of the nature of the innovation introduced. If some of the concepts introduced were

'foreign', as I have demonstrated in the case of KBSR, these must be defended on educational grounds and must be tested for their compatibility and adaptability within the Malaysian context. Formative evaluation of the curriculum is important here to provide feedback and modifications should be carried out where necessary, or even rejections. Clearly in the case of KBSR, a trial period of one year followed by nation-wide implementation could not have been sufficient to conduct a critical evaluation of the programme.

This study also indicates that in the rush to introduce KBSR, several factors relating to conditions of implementation were not realistically taken into account. The required resources for effective implementation were inadequate - there was a shortage of materials, shortage of teachers, pressure on limited time and financial constraints generally. The implementation of KBSR was affected by all these constraints. Clearly a longer period of planning would have helped to resolve some of these problems. The lesson to be learnt is that curriculum planning and decisions should be made based on sound educational reasons rather than be directed or influenced prematurely by political demand.

With regard to theories of curriculum change generally, it is important to take into consideration the locality in which the change is to take place. I have demonstrated that

in the case of Malaysia, for national and economic reasons as well as because of the hierarchical educational structure, the favoured model of change is ultimately the RDD paradigm. More importantly, because primary teachers are not highly qualified and have not been trained for adequate curricular understanding, they are not in a position to initiate change or engage in school-based curriculum development. This is probably true of other Third World countries as well, where a similar professional inadequacy exists among teachers. I am, in other words, extrapolating from the Malaysian case that the popular school-based curriculum development model currently favoured in the western world, and claimed to result in desirable consequences (cf. Hargreaves, 1982), may not be generalizable to Third World education systems. Thus, in neighbouring Indonesia , the Development Schools project initiated in 1971 at first left the eight project schools to their own devices, but after two years, when the slow rate of progress was becoming a matter of concern, it was decided that centralised control by the Ministry of Education and Culture was necessary (Adams, 1981).

However, saying that the RDD paradigm is the favoured model of change in Malaysia is not an acknowledgement that it is a suitable and non-problematic model. On the contrary, my analysis of previous curriculum development projects and the data on the implementation of KBSR indicate

that some of the problems normally associated with this top-down or centre-periphery model surface in the Malaysian context as well, notably teacher rejection of the recommended classroom practices and lack of commitment on the part of implementors generally. This implies that Malaysian curriculum developers must conceive of a different model of change, one which is neither school-based nor centre-periphery. What is more acceptable, probably, is a change process initiated at the centre - since the present professional inadequacy among teachers and other constraints make it unlikely that they would initiate change - but one which counts on a great deal of active participation and input by the teachers, so that the innovation 'belongs' to them. They will, of course, have to be guided and encouraged to participate and the change that takes place will be incremental but it will be more meaningful. Such a model of change could perhaps be called the teacher participation model.

Future Research

My study also has implications for future research. I believe more research need to be done on KBSR, especially after the first cycle of six years has been completed in 1988. Such studies should not be confined to evaluating the achievement of the 3Rs but appraise critically whether the

stated objective of overall development has been achieved. It might be asked, for example, whether children are now more open and less timid, whether they are more creative, whether there is more cooperation in the classroom. On the part of teachers, are they less authoritarian now? Have they managed to come to terms with inquiry-based teaching and learning? In the light of the empirical data concerning the unintended consequences of teachers' emphasis on remediation at the expense of enrichment, have the brighter children really been disadvantaged? With respect to education as an apparatus for achieving national unity, what is the effect of Moral Education on pupils' attitude towards racial differences and values? It would also be relevant to compare the implementation of KBSR in rich urban schools with its implementation in impoverished rural schools; in addition, it is also important to compare KBSR implementation in national schools with its implementation in national-type schools where the medium of instruction is Chinese or Tamil.

The list of possible researches can go on indefinitely. The point is that a curriculum which affects the lives of all Malaysian children of primary school age should be continuously evaluated and improved and not be allowed to escape public scrutiny. The advent of the new Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools is likely to shift the focus of attention to the secondary level of schooling.

This makes it important to continue to monitor and investigate primary curricular provision, for primary education is after all the first stage in public education, which is considered central to build^{ing} a Malaysian nation.

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Appendix I:

The Malaysian National Ideology (English Translation)

RUKUNEGARA

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a land of many races. The diverse social, cultural and economic values which exist in our multiracial society are complicated by the identification of certain economic groups with particular racial communities and geographical locations. A further divisive factor is a distinct generation gap.

Many will recall the misgivings which accompanied our independence because of the nature and composition of our society. But our commitment to a united Malaysian nation inspired our people to strive in the face of these obstacles to build a society in which a nation of diverse races, religions and cultures would endure and flourish. We are convinced that our very diversity can be a source of strength.

Our people have lived together for generations in peace and harmony sharing the resources with which Nature had richly endowed our land. Together we had worked for our independence and together we had resisted several encroachments on our national integrity and independence. Together we were building slowly but surely the foundations

of a society in which there is a place for everyone.

However, our nation-building efforts were marred by activities of destructive elements. These elements are to be found in all communities. From time to time latent racialist attitudes and racial prejudices were exploited on various pretexts leading to racial incidents. The most serious racial incident was the riot of May 13, 1969, in the Federal Capital.

All these factors have pointed to the need to renew and redouble our efforts in nation-building.

The task of national consolidation is the responsibility of every one. It will demand the formulation and implementation of sound, dynamic, coherent and co-ordinated policies and programmes. Activities in political, economic, educational, social and cultural fields must be geared towards the objective of national unity.

This is the urgent task before us and how we respond to this challenge will determine whether Malaysia as a nation will survive and succeed. We now need a renewed sense of direction and national purpose. We need to rededicate ourselves to certain goals - goals which will bring about a community of interests and a sense of common identity.

It is clear that the road ahead is not without problems. This should not, however, deter us. Life itself is full of problems. Everything depends on us. If we can rise to the

challenges of our time and turn them into opportunities, we shall emerge a stronger and more united nation, bound together by a heritage of past memories, triumphs and tribulation, surer of itself and confident of the future, and ready to march forward together towards still greater heights of endeavour and achievement.

In our endeavour to achieve these ends we shall be guided by certain principles which have evolved in the course of a common history, signifying a synthesis of thoughts and feelings, and which have been enshrined in our Constitution. These ends and these principles which will guide our actions will together constitute our RUKUNEGARA.

DECLARATION

OUR NATION, MALAYSIA, being dedicated

to achieving a greater unity of all her peoples;

to maintaining a democratic way of life;

to creating a just society in which the wealth of the nation shall be equitably shared;

to ensuring a liberal approach to her rich and diverse cultural traditions;

to building a progressive society which shall be oriented to modern science and technology;

We, her peoples, pledge our united efforts to attain these ends guided by these principles:

Belief in God (Kepercayaan kepada Tuhan)

Loyalty to King and Country (Kesetiaan kepada Raja dan Negara)

Upholding the Constitution (Keluhuran Perlembagaan)

Rule of Law (Kedaulatan Undang-Undang)

Good Behaviour and Morality (Kesopanan dan Kesusilaan)

Appendix II:

The Philosophy of Primary Education (English Translation)

THE PHILOSOPHY OF PRIMARY EDUCATION

Pupils at the primary school level should acquire skills and knowledge through direct experiences. Such experiences encompass the intellectual, spiritual and physical, and must be appropriate and relevant with the aims that are to be achieved through interesting activities. The active involvement of every pupil is important to the teaching-learning process.

All methods, activities, classroom organization, time-tabling and teaching-learning materials must be based on the principle of flexibility, appropriate for the pupils as well as the aims to be achieved. At the primary school level pupils must be given the opportunity to express their feelings and ideas through speech, art, music, dance and movements and other activities. Ample opportunities must be provided to nurture their creativity.

The evaluation process must be an integral part of classroom activities, so that it assists pupils and teachers to increase the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. In addition, evaluation serves to provide feedback on the pupils' level of achievement and rate of growth.

The school environment must provide pupils with real-life

experiences such as problem solving, exchanging ideas and opinions, and establishing understanding and co-operation among themselves. The classroom climate must encourage pupils to think, to question and to express their opinions.

On the whole, education at the primary level takes cognizance of the overall development of the pupils and does not focus on any one particular aspect only. It is hoped that every child will experience a balanced development intellectually, spiritually and physically.

Source: Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia (1983a), Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah - Matlamat, Rasional, Bidang Pelajaran dan Strategi Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran [The New Primary School Curriculum - Aims, Rationale, Areas of Study and Teaching and Learning Strategies], p. 4. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

Appendix III: BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE

Date and Time:

Place:

1. Interviewee:

2. Age (Optional):

3. Qualification

(Academic):

(Professional):

4. Years of Teaching Experience:

5. In-Service Course/Courses related to KBSR attended:

<u>Nature of Course</u>	<u>Duration</u>	<u>Organizer</u>
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.....
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.....
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6. Other Courses/Seminars/Workshops attended:

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7. Present Designation/Post:

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8. Responsibilities:

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Appendix IV: AGENDA FOR INTERVIEWS

1. The Planning Phase of KBSR

Probe for:

- its connection with the Cabinet Committee Report (1979) and other political factors;
- Connection with 'Professional' reports and past curriculum projects;
- approximate date of planning and the people involved;
- whether plans for implementing were clearly specified: implementation strategies;
- whether the project was revised after the trial stage and, nature of revision; foreign expert involvement and visits to similar projects abroad.

2. Perception and Understanding of KBSR:

Probe for:

- rationale, philosophy and aims of KBSR;
- learning and other outcomes expected;
- differences between KBSR and the old primary curriculum;
- understanding of individual differences and overall development;

- understanding of Moral Education and integration of subjects;
- understanding of inquiry method;
- understanding of 'enrichment' and 'remediation';
- understanding of formative and summative evaluations;
- beliefs in developing children's creativity and talents.

3. Classroom Organization and Activities

Probe for:

- factors determining the teachers' organization of activities;
- factors determining the arrangement of materials/resources in the classroom;
- basis for grouping;
- the demand on the teachers in terms of preparation;
- flexibility/rigidity in the timetable;
- teacher-pupil relationship.

Problems and Success of Implementation

Probe for:

- problems anticipated by planners;

- problems encountered by implementors;
- deviation from, or modification of, the original plan;
- goals that have been accomplished;
- criteria for successful implementation of KBSR.